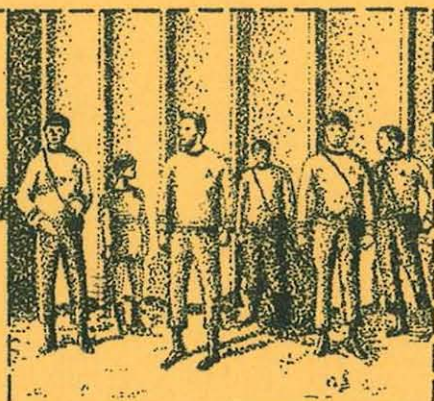
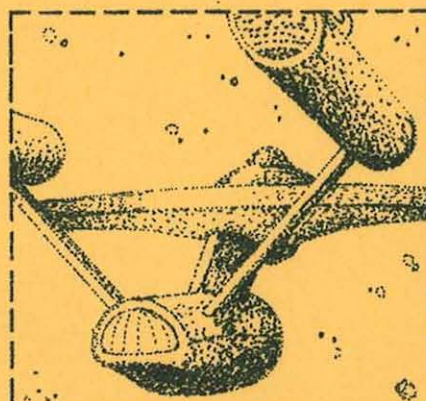
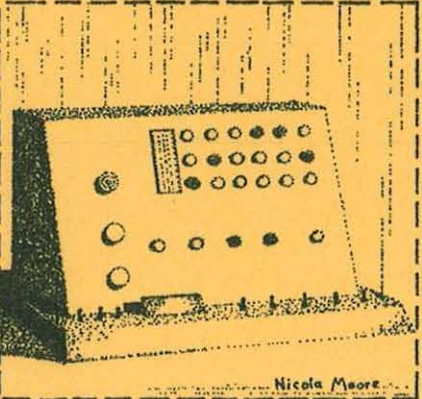
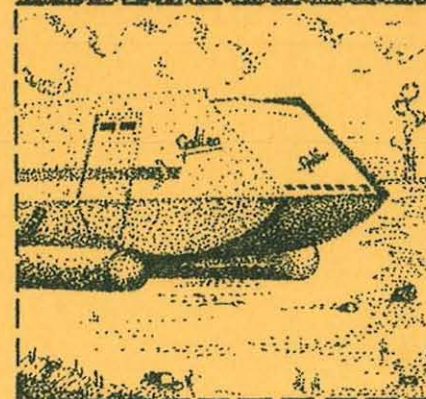
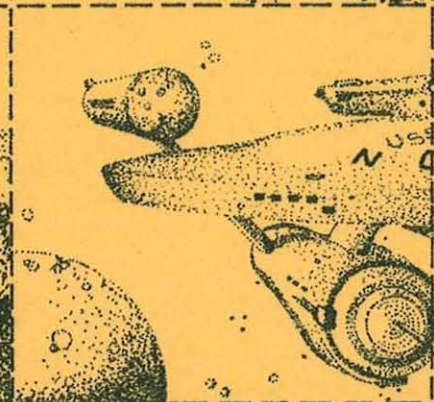
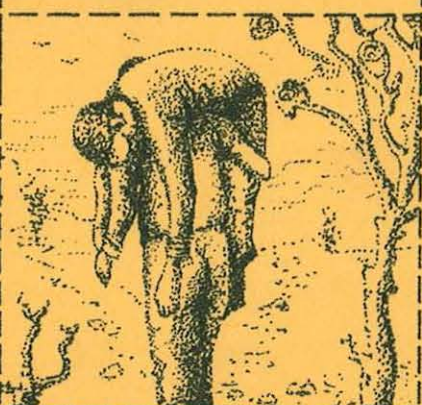
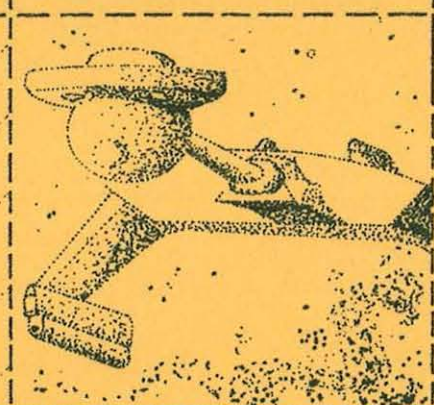
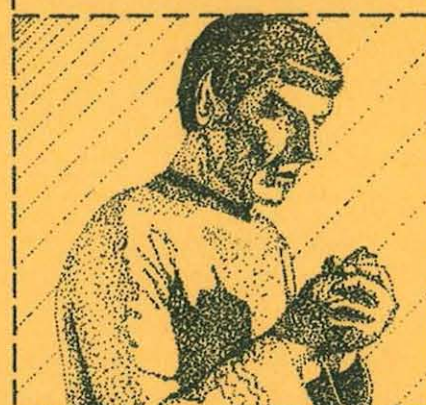




REPEAT MISSIONS 2



Nicola Moore

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Welcome to Repeat Missions 2.

We've reprinted from four zines this time - The Yeti's Footprint, Enterprise Incidents 1, and Log Entries 6 & 8. There was Janet's Babel Scene in LE 6 that we felt deserved a reprint and also a couple of good poems that there wasn't room for last time.

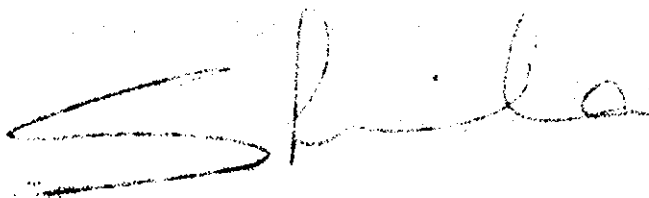
This is the third zine I've cut the stencils for inside a month, and as I'm having to proofread it myself, I hope you'll all excuse the mistakes. I'm suffering from stencil fatigue. (James T. is suffering from printing fatigue - or if he isn't, he should be.) By the con, too, some of us are going to have collating fatigue - with four new zines and five reprints to collate in four weeks, we're all going to be busy. Janet will probably be collating this one, but I'd like to say a special thank you here to my little 'chain gang' of helpers who turn up with unfailing cheerfulness on Tuesdays - and some of them come a fair distance, too - to spend many, many evenings picking up sheets of paper...

We've decided that all the Baillie stories will go into RM 3, which will make it a good bit longer than our zines usually are. This will mean a higher price for it, but I think you'll find it worth it to have all the Baillie stories so far written in one zine. Of course, we're all hoping that Baillie will get himself out of the rec room where he's been skulking for some months and tell us a few more stories!

Non members of STAG can get information on zines in print, and new and forthcoming zines by sending a SAE (or addressed envelope and 2 IRCs) to me.

Enjoy the zine!

October 1979

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sheila". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

THE FIRES OF LORN by Sheila Clark

Kirk was puzzled.

Since the new Senior Medical Officer, Dr. McCoy, had come on board the Enterprise, he had been trying to develop some sort of relationship with him - in vain. McCoy, it seemed, did not want any sort of Human relationship; even Spock had noticed it. But then, neither did he want a Vulcan one; Spock had tried speaking to him, and had been rudely rebuffed.

"Just leave me alone," McCoy had growled. "Let me get on with my duties; you don't need to discuss anything with me unless and until I prove inefficient."

Kirk was unhappy about the situation as well as puzzled. He prided himself on running a happy ship; it upset him that anyone on board should reject the camaraderie the Enterprise offered everyone.

What he did not - could not - know was that McCoy also was desperately unhappy. He wanted to respond to Kirk's friendly attitude; but he couldn't. His divorce was too recent. He turned away from companionship...and alone, he brooded over the long breakdown of his marriage. His wife's frequent infidelities... He had come to accept them, he loved her, even part of her attention was precious to him...only she knew too well that he had decided that even accepting her cruelty and living in misery was preferable to living without her...and she had set out to make his life more and more unbearable, to show him her power over him... She had even alienated their daughter from him. Though, he remembered with a spark of pleasure, Joanna had eventually seen through her mother's actions. It was she who had eventually persuaded him to break free...yet, free, he still longed for the faithless woman who had subjected him to hell for so many years.

He was enough of a psychologist - and certainly enough of an introvert - to know that his preoccupation with the past was unhealthy. Yet he found that he was afraid to trust anyone...even another man. One of her lovers had been a man he called friend, a man he had believed he could trust...that had been the most hurting of all her fidelities, he thought...she had set out to seduce his friend, and he had not only succumbed but had then prolonged the affair. He could have forgiven Bill, he thought, if it had only been the once; he couldn't forgive the months that Bill had continued to deceive him. And he couldn't forgive the loneliness that the affair had caused him, for he hadn't trusted anyone since.

He tried persuading himself that here, on this Starship, things could be different; but his fear of fresh disillusionment was too strong. He tried telling himself that the Vulcan could be trusted; Vulcans were known for their loyalty - they held disloyalty in total abhorrence, he knew; and was convinced that with his luck, he'd strike the one Vulcan who was capable of disloyalty... anyway, Spock was half Human, and McCoy certainly distrusted the Human half. Only with Scotty was he at all at ease...the man he had known before his marriage, and hadn't met during it, but with whom he had carried on a spasmodic but worthwhile correspondence during the terrible years when death itself would have been preferable to life. Even with Scotty, he held back...but Scotty understood. He knew a little - a very little - of what had been done to McCoy during those years - times when McCoy, in despair, had given him some clue, in the bitterness of his letters, of what had been happening. Virtually all he could offer McCoy was his company when solitude became even more unbearable than company. One night he got McCoy drunk, and learned a great deal more than he had previously known; but he kept his own counsel. He could have mentioned something to Kirk, who was, he knew, worried about the surgeon, but he felt that McCoy would regard it as another betrayal if he did. And the last thing McCoy needed was another betrayal. Just one more might destroy him utterly.

Matters continued in this way for some time, while the Enterprise moved on through space. McCoy, seeing the friendship around him, became, if anything,

even more bitter that he could not - dare not - share it; and rejected every attempt to include him among them that the rest of the crew made. He found himself even beginning to reject Scotty, who watched, not knowing what to do to help his friend.

Matters were at this stage when the Enterprise reached Delta Leporis. There was a small research station on its third planet, living in an uneasy peace with the native humanoids, who called their world 'Lorn' - a word which, in their own tongue, meant 'Earth'. The natives themselves were friendly, but there was a small but powerful guild of men who, for lack of a better term, the research personnel called 'witch doctors'. Certainly they seemed to have the function of healers, but the settlers had early learned that their cures were rather ineffectual. Most of the sick who were 'cured' by them would have recovered naturally by themselves; the really sick died. And the witch doctors claimed that the dead had not had enough faith in the cure for it to work.

The station personnel had not, however, tried to do anything about it; that would have been accounted interference in the native culture. But one or two of the natives, seeing that none of the newcomers had yet died, had gone to them for medical help instead of to the witch doctors.

The station doctor had given it; so far, no-one had died after his help, and so the witch doctors had said nothing. But he knew that they were only biding their time. The first death after a Federation treatment, and there would be trouble. But he was temperamentally incapable of refusing help to the ailing.

Kirk included McCoy in the landing party, wondering if the change in environment, and the company of the station doctor, might begin to break down the wall that the surgeon had so obviously erected around himself...no-one, Kirk knew, could be so utterly self-sufficient except through choice - or so apparently self-sufficient. And it was becoming clear to him that whoever broke through to McCoy, it wasn't going to be him.

Only it didn't work. McCoy was even more abrupt and cynical than usual.

They were still there, talking to the station personnel, when two natives arrived, one of them carrying a sick child. The station doctor turned to meet them; McCoy, showing the first sign of interest that he had yet shown, joined him.

"They've begun to trust us," Dr. Watson said. "They've been coming for treatment for some months now."

"What about the native medicine men?" McCoy asked.

"They don't like it, but they haven't done anything about it that we know of."

The two doctors bent over the sick child. The illness was obviously well advanced - too well advanced.

When the landing party went back to the Enterprise, McCoy asked permission to remain behind - the ship didn't have to leave for some hours. "The child's very ill," he explained abruptly.

Kirk nodded. "Yes, of course," he agreed, glad to see McCoy showing concern for someone, and also, in a way, glad to let McCoy see that he could be flexible and reasonable.

The child died.

Immediately, the witch doctors moved.

They went to the station, demanding the two doctors, accusing them of

causing the death of the child by their alien treatment. Before the station commander could do anything, the witch doctors had left, taking Watson and McCoy by force. The commander, Lt. Taylor, contacted Kirk.

He explained what had happened, and finished, "There was nothing I could do."

"I'll be right down," Kirk said.

He beamed down alone. Spock wanted to accompany him, but Kirk refused. "The situation down there must be pretty explosive," he said. "The witch doctors must be the bosses down there; with a dead child as ammunition, they'll be able to manoeuvre things to suit themselves. I want to try to save McCoy; he's a good doctor, even if he wasn't one of my men. Watson, too, if it's at all possible; but I don't want to risk anyone else in the process."

Taylor met him when he beamed down. "The natives are showing signs of hostility - though not as many as I'd have expected. Maybe they're a bit disillusioned themselves at the witch doctors; they wouldn't have been coming to us for medical help otherwise. And one of them whispered to me that the dead child was an orphan, brought here by members of a witch doctor's family."

"Watson and McCoy were set up?"

"It looks like it."

"Any idea where they were taken?"

"To the witch doctors' village," Taylor replied.

"And?"

"I don't know. But I imagine they'll be killed. I didn't have enough men here to defy the witch doctors, Captain...and anyway, I have my orders; not to alienate the natives if at all possible."

Taylor gave Kirk directions for finding the witch doctors' village, and Kirk set off quickly, afraid that, even so, he would be too late.

The village was built in a hollow surrounded by low, undulating hills. Trees grew sparsely around. To one side of the village was another hollow. Smoke rose ominously from it; and from its direction came the sound of screaming. Kirk shivered at the agony in the screams, wondering what was happening, aware that the two Humans must be the victims, angry that they should be treated in such a way, and yet realising that it was stupid - Spock would have said illogical - to be angry with the natives for behaving according to their own culture.

He moved quickly towards the smoke-filled hollow, not yet able to see into it.

As he came in sight of its centre, the screaming stopped. At first he could see nothing in the hollow for the smoke. Natives stood around the rim of the hollow; fewer of them than he'd expected; then he realised that the killing must be being watched only by the witch doctors - and perhaps by some chiefs, too, but not by the ordinary people.

Then the smoke cleared slightly.

In the centre of the hollow was a pole. Tied to this pole, hanging limp, held up only by it, was a man in surgeon's blues - a uniform burned and smoke-blackened, but still recognisable - barely. From this distance, and with the victim's head dropped forward, Kirk couldn't make out which of the two men it was. He ran forward.

The natives were moving now, as several of them made their way into the hollow, picking their way carefully - the ground was obviously very hot. They removed the limp figure from the pole, carried it out of the hollow, and dropped it carelessly on the ground as Kirk reached them.

He looked down at it. He still could not tell which of the doctors it had been; the face was burned beyond recognition. Feeling slightly sick, he looked away from the half-cremated body and up at the witch doctors who stood there.

"What have they done, that they must suffer this?"

"They are responsible for the death of one of our people."

"Would your own cures have worked?"

"Perhaps. If the child believed sufficiently that we would cure him."

"The child was too ill, and too young, to believe anything," Kirk replied.

The spokesman of the witch doctors threw him a look of pure hatred, and said, "Your 'doctors' are not members of our guild of healers."

"They are members of the guild of healers of our own people."

"The child died."

"The child would have died anyway. Would he not?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not."

Out of the corner of his eye, Kirk saw another figure in blue being forced into the hollow...no, not forced, exactly, he was not resisting - but without turning and looking directly he couldn't see which one it was. "Must they both die?" he asked.

"No." Despite his obvious hatred of Kirk, the man was honest. "Any of the witnesses may attempt a rescue."

"Attempt?"

"When the fires are lit, any of the witnesses may try to cross the flames and release the criminal. If he does so, successfully, and brings the criminal back safely through the flames, the man is freed."

Kirk nodded. "I may attempt this?"

The witch doctor signified agreement. "You may; but what guarantee have we that your people will not take vengeance on us for your death when you fail?"

Kirk pulled out his communicator. "I will tell my people that if I die, it is my own fault."

"Very well."

Kirk flipped open the communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Spock here."

"Mr. Spock. I have a chance to save one of the doctors. If I die in the attempt, it will be my own fault, and not that of the natives."

"Captain - "

"You will not interfere, Mr. Spock. That's an order. We must abide by the local rules, otherwise the research station will have to close and we will be unable to maintain contact with this culture. Kirk out." He closed the communicator and turned back to the witch doctor. "Satisfied?"

The man nodded again. Kirk could see satisfaction in his face, and knew that in the native's opinion, he had no chance, and that the witch doctor welcomed the thought that another of these intruding aliens would die.

Kirk now looked directly into the hollow.

The doctor was tied to the pole; and Kirk could still not see clearly which one it was. He hoped it was McCoy - logically it should be; the witch doctors would surely be more intent on destroying the one they knew, the one who had been usurping their position - McCoy had simply been a bonus to them, as he would be - but he had no certainty that the natives could, in fact, tell one alien from another. If that was so, McCoy could have died first...and though McCoy was still a stranger to him, he was one of his men...and he hated losing any of his men. Smoke still curled lazily from the ground. What made it burn? Wisps of smoke drifted between him and the sacrificial pole... He didn't think he had been seen

yet by the unfortunate doctor, who appeared to be paying little attention to what was going on. Was it McCoy?

Then, with a suddenness that made him jump, flames shot up from the ground. What made it burn? He had seen nothing to cause it...the natives had lit nothing. He glanced at the smiling witch doctor, who watched him, spite in his eyes.

"Are you still willing to try to rescue him?"

"Yes."

Kirk turned then, and without hesitation plunged forward.

Smoke stung his throat; fumes made him choke, and he gasped in more of the acrid smoke. He coughed, and each cough, as he gasped for breath, forced him to inhale more of the fumes. This wouldn't do. He stopped, shielded his mouth and nose with his sleeve, and brought his breathing under control. As he did, heat from the fire singed his clothes and hair. He tried to orientate himself. In the coughing spasm, had he lost sight of the direction in which he had to go? He could only hope not. He could see only a few feet. He went on in what he hoped was the right direction.

Fresh flames shot from the ground close beside him, and involuntarily he jerked away, tripped and fell. His right hand landed on a red-hot stone; he tried to pull away from it, but his weight was on it, and it took a couple of seconds to readjust his balance so that he could lift his hand. He scrambled to his feet again, hardly aware of the burning agony in his hand except as an accompaniment to the inferno. An unwary deep breath brought hot air into his lungs, and he realised that he could have damaged them quite seriously. He must watch not to breathe too deeply.

He moved on, feeling his way, one sleeve over his nose to keep from breathing in too much of the heated air, unable to go too fast in case he walked straight into one of the flame gushers, which seemed to vary their position... No, that couldn't be possible, was he hallucinating? There was as yet no screaming...was that worth anything?

Then he came into an almost clear space. The pole was in front on him. He was behind the victim, and still couldn't see his face. He stumbled round to the front of the pole.

It was McCoy.

McCoy had gone to the sacrifice, if not willingly, at least with complete resignation. This was the end. Death was almost welcome. No more fear, no more worry...no more dread of betrayal, no more loneliness. He prepared himself to die with courage, hoping that he would not give the natives the satisfaction of hearing him scream as Watson had done. The natives were masters of suspense, it seemed; when the flames sprang up, they were not, at first, near him, though the spouts of flame were coming nearer with every eruption.

The flames were close when, out of the smoke behind him, came a blackened figure that he recognised, with some astonishment, as his Captain.

"Captain!" he gasped.

"Are you all right?" Kirk asked as he reached for the knots tying McCoy.

"Yes; the flames have been too far away... But you, Captain..." as he realised more fully the condition of Kirk's clothes and hair, "...what about you?"

"I'll do," Kirk said, struggling with the obstinate bindings. They were not rope - of course not, he thought, rope would burn - and they were difficult to untie. It didn't help that he only had the full use of his left hand; for the first time he realised just how badly the right one was damaged. But he had to use it to unfasten McCoy. He grunted involuntarily as the rough bindings tore at the burns.

"What's wrong?" McCoy asked.

"Burned my hand a little," Kirk said as the fastenings gave way. McCoy turned, reaching for Kirk's hands.

"Let me see..."

"No time," Kirk said. "We have to get out. We can't beam back to the ship, unfortunately; we have to stick to the rules. If we can get back to the edge of the hollow, you'll be counted innocent of causing the child's death. Come on."

Together they moved back into the inferno. "Keep your arm over your mouth," Kirk warned.

McCoy nodded. He knew all about the danger of breathing over heated air.

Somehow, now that he had company, Kirk found the conditions not quite so unpleasant. In addition, he was relieved - more relieved than he would have thought possible - that the survivor was, in fact, the unfriendly McCoy.

Flames spouted up round them, and once, on the way back, McCoy pulled Kirk away from a gusher that sprang up close - though not as close as the one that had burned him. As they went, getting nearer the perimeter, the flames lessened; and at last, they stumbled into clear air.

The witch doctor walked over to them, unwilling respect on his face. "Your friend is declared innocent of causing the death of the child," he told Kirk stiffly.

"Thank you," Kirk said. With his left hand he pulled out his communicator. "Two to beam up."

They were barely materialised when McCoy reached again for Kirk's hand - he knew now which one was burned. He drew in his breath sharply when he saw the extent of the damage to it. "Sickbay, Captain," he said. "Now."

Kirk nodded. He felt tired and weak now from the reaction, and he stumbled as he left the transporter pad. McCoy caught him before he could fall.

"I'll manage," he said.

McCoy looked at him. "Who are you trying to impress, Captain?"

Kirk shook his head. "I'll manage," he repeated.

McCoy slipped an arm round him. "All right, but lean on me."

In sickbay, he checked Kirk over carefully once he had attended to the immediately obvious injuries - he himself was uninjured. "Some slight damage to the lungs," he said. "Did you breathe in any of that superheated air?"

"A little, I think," Kirk admitted.

"And you didn't think it worthwhile telling me? How am I supposed to treat my patients when they won't co-operate?" He scowled at Kirk, and pointed to one of the beds. "Lie down. I'm not letting you out of here for a couple of days, so you may as well make yourself comfortable."

"Doctor, I think you're a bit of a bully." Kirk watched McCoy carefully as he spoke, his mental fingers crossed that he wasn't ruining his contact with McCoy almost before it was created. McCoy looked at him, and Kirk flinched at the look in the doctor's eyes. "Sorry," he said. "That wasn't a very good joke."

McCoy seemed to relax. "All doctors are bullies," he said. "Sometimes it's the only way to get the patients to behave themselves."

Kirk grinned at him.

"Captain..." McCoy hesitated. "Captain - thank you. You could have died down there..."

"It's all right," Kirk said. "And McCoy - I was glad to see it was you, and not Watson."

They looked at each other. Kirk took a deep breath.

He had reached McCoy after all. Only time would tell what sort of relationship would develop between them. But contact had been made.

Careful, Jim - don't push too hard.

"Doctor - get Spock down here, please. I want to see him."

SILENT LOVE by Margaret Bertram

You call me the Companion,
Don't you know
That I am more than that?
When you arrived, so close to death,
There was no thought
Except the wish to help
To make you well and end your suffering.
But gradually there was a change
When I enveloped you,
A glittering cloud.
There was emotion -
More than that, was love.
Oh Human friend,
Why don't you understand?
And yet
I fear that true awareness will bring pain
And separation.
So let us just remain the way we are,
And though I long to hear you say
The magic Human words
"I love!"
I'll be content
Remaining what I'm now -
A friend, companion,
Ready to be called, to help.
And never shall you know
That the mysterious glitter that you see
Is nothing but my tears -
A rainbow-shower of tears
Of love unanswered -
Love that dare not speak.

KIRK: Mr. Spock, since none of the sensors are working properly, how can you be so certain that the planet we are orbiting is uninhabited?

SPOCK: Quite easily, Captain. I ordered the landing party to begin their survey by digging a hole. Since nobody arrived to watch them, it is clear that the planet must be uninhabited.

KIRK: Very well, Mr. Spock. Carry on.

* * * * *

KIRK: You have just beamed down to an unknown planet and see a large hairy monster approaching you. What steps do you take?

CHEKOV: Large ones in the opposite direction, Sir.

THE YETI'S FOOTPRINT by Elizabeth Sharp

The sun shone on an all but dead world. Its pale, yellow rays flickered across the white, petrified forest, and stretched onward into the empty wilderness beyond. Death and desolation had marked this planet for their own, the results of their labour plain to see. It was not for sorrow at the death of his people that had driven Bork to his new height of insanity. Not for the waste of a thousand million years did he curse the stars. Not out of any sense of shame or grief at the total destruction of his race did he pace the once proud rain forest, night after night. But because they had left him, because he was the last one alive, Bork cried out his hatred at the Universe. Alone in his torment, the large apeman had scurried deep into the forest, far from the sight and smell of the decaying remains of his people.

He had lived that way for five centuries, in total seclusion. Then the new creatures had appeared. They were small and revolting, but Bork had studied them. On occasions he had even wandered into their minds, probing their thoughts. But they had gone and once more he was alone.

He sniffed at the breeze, his huge paws striking at air as the sulphur smell reached him. The wind was getting stronger, rustling the bare branches above his head and he realised he had very little time left. But as desperation and loneliness threatened to crush him, his telepathic sense came to his rescue. Bork crouched, his gaze held upwards at the sky, staring into the coming dawn. He growled, once, ever so softly, as the tiny light followed a perfect arc in the sky from East to West, then vanished into darkness. The Humans had come again and this time he would strike.

Slowly the lines of his body altered till they disappeared into the golden, translucent cloud that Bork had become. The cloud vanished in the light of the rising sun.

The leaf slowly turned towards the golden sunlight. With its slim line and stem and deep green, it was all but perfection. Only, at the very tip a little bit of brown had crept in, curling the edges ever so slightly. Nature would do her best to shine till the brown crept to the middle, bringing death with it. Still, the tiny speck of green had pride of place now.

It was the only leaf left alive. It fluttered in the breeze as the sun sent grey shadows dancing across the barren, desolate landscape.

Spock stood near to the edge of the cliff. Far below the land stretched endlessly to the horizon, till it met the jagged, rugged cliffs that clawed the alien sky.

The Vulcan felt his clothing being plucked by the wind. The icy breeze was becoming a gale and the distant howl took possession of the atmosphere. A movement caught Spock's attention. The leaf fluttered, then fell from the white branch to the dry ground next to his feet. The gale had been too much of a battle and the leaf was sent scurrying to the brink of the cliff - and over it.

The wind blew in his face, bringing the smell of sulphur with it. Spock saw, in the distance, a fountain of fire being expelled with violent fury from the confines of the planet's core. Energies that could no longer be contained burst from the distant volcanoes, sending a stream of lava to create a fiery, moving landscape.

In that violent, empty place where fire was becoming the dominant element, it would take a man of extraordinary sensitivity to find anything of beauty. But such a man stood on the edge of the sheer rock. Spock was a Vulcan and a scientist, and the constant movement, the rising sound and the display of nature's forces at work formed beauty in his eyes.

The wind brought a new sound to his ears - the sound of voices. He turned away from the precipice, and walked towards the hidden grove in the direction of

the voices. He walked round the ruins of an ancient stone building and found the group standing on the other side. Captain Kirk nodded in acknowledgement as he came to join them.

"Seen anything, Mr. Spock?"

Spock shook his head. "No, Captain, I've seen no indication of any life form and tricorder readings concur with earlier ones taken by previous expeditions to this planet. The world is dead except for the simplest of life in plant form."

John Thomson made a business of clearing his throat. He was a short, well built man with dark hair and pale grey eyes that seemed to be perpetually frowning. Thomson was a scientist - not a very distinguished one, but he was the leader of a group of six other scientists, four men and two women, who had come to study the planet Krail for six months. They were all here now, standing in a semi-circle facing Kirk, Spock, Dr. McCoy and Lt. Sulu, the Enterprise having just brought them to Krail. Thomson didn't like Spock and he had gone out of his way the past six days to make his feelings well known, not only to the Vulcan but to everyone else on board. In return, Kirk detested him and was only too glad that after six days they were at last 'Getting shot of the little newt'. Thomson's voice dripped with contempt as he addressed Spock.

"Excuse me, Commander, but if this planet is totally devoid of life as you say, what made these footprints which, I may add, have been made during the last five hours?"

Spock glanced down to where Thomson pointed. The tiny grove collected water and on the ground in the muddy patch that Thomson had indicated, several large impressions were clustered. They were footprints, but by their size and shape they obviously belonged to some large apelike animal, resembling as much as anything the fictitious Yeti's.

Spock looked at Thomson. "I accept that these prints exist and my tricorder readings confirm the time they were made. However, I can find no indication of the life form that made them. This phenomenon has been known for a long time; indeed, this is the reason you have come to Krail - to investigate the footprints."

"That's quite right, Mr. Thomson," Kirk added. "If Mr. Spock knew what had made the footprints, it would hardly be worth your while coming here."

"Quite so, Captain," replied Thomson, "but I have an excellent scientific qualification. I'll find out."

Kirk was on the verge of telling Thomson exactly where he could put his qualification when Spock excused himself and left. The stone ruins behind him had roused his curiosity and he wanted to take tricorder readings before Kirk ordered the landing party to beam up. The building had obviously been a large one, but only two sides of the construction remained - the North and East walls. The other two walls had gone, as had the roof. All of the interior had gone, except for a small stone or altar that stood against the North wall. Spock pushed the button on the tricorder and noted the readings with interest. The building proved to have been erected just over nine hundred Earth years previously. It had been damaged for five centuries and had thus stood longer as a ruin than as a complete building. Spock looked up from his study to find Kirk standing beside him.

"Anything unusual, Spock?"

"No, sir. It would seem that this building was erected by a primitive race. There have been other ruins found elsewhere on Krail, but this is the most complete building still in existence. It is only round this ruin that the claw-like footprints have been observed."

Kirk nodded and looked round at the bare interior. As he did so, he missed the start of what was to become one of the most horrifying experiences of his life.

It was like a burst of sunlight, and Spock's eyes darted to the light's source, at the very tip of the North wall. For a brief fraction of a second the

Vulcan's eyes were dazzled by the light and his head swam with a distant, obscure sound. He felt a sensation, like a heart beat, engulfing him - and then it was gone. He decided not to mention it since he felt perfectly normal again and even began to wonder if it had happened at all.

If Kirk had been watching his First Officer, he would have been in no doubt as to the reality of his friend's experience. It would have been impossible to mistake the look of total blankness that flashed across Spock's usually alert face. But the Captain's eyes had been elsewhere for the few brief seconds it takes to scan two bare walls. His eyes returned to the Vulcan as Spock switched off the tricorder.

"Very well, Spock, I doubt if we can learn anything else here. We'll beam back up to the ship and send down Thomson's supplies. Then we can leave the 'little genius' to his mysterious footprints." Spock nodded and followed his Captain outside to join McCoy and Sulu. Kirk took out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here, Captain."

"The landing party is ready to beam up, Mr. Scott." Kirk lowered the communicator and glanced ahead of him. "Goodbye, Mr. Thomson, ladies, gentlemen. I wish you every success in your investigations. O.K., Scotty, energise."

The landing party vanished in the sparkle of the transporter beam. Gradually their surroundings solidified into the interior of the transporter room. It was here that Spock had the first of many shocks.

Part of him, it seemed, was seeing the transporter room for the first time. A feeling of strangeness came over the Vulcan as the reality of the experience struck him. A terrible loneliness surrounded him, only to vanish as suddenly as it had come. Now Spock felt compelled to tell Kirk, even if the Captain thought he was insane. He opened his mouth to speak, only to close it again as no words came out. Instead, a voice came into his mind, a dominant voice which demanded to be obeyed.

- No. You will not speak to him. You will never speak about me to any of them. -

The echo of the voice still in his mind, Spock stood alone on the transporter platform. McCoy turned to stand and watch him, curious. The Vulcan looked so dismayed that McCoy felt quite anxious. He touched Spock's arm and spoke quietly.

"Spock...Spock, are you all right?" No answer. "Are you in pain?"

The First Officer looked at him. He wanted to tell him about the voice, but as he spoke, he became painfully aware that the words were not his. "I am all right, Doctor. Don't trouble yourself."

Shaking his arm free from McCoy's hand, Spock brushed past him to follow Kirk and Sulu to the bridge, aware now that not only his thoughts but his actions, too, were under an alien control.

All Spock could do was obey.

Bork relaxed in the mind link. So far, his mission was successful. He had left the dead forest far behind him. In pure energy he had merged with this alien and only he knew he was here. Soon the alien would die, and he, Bork, would take his place. He would take over the control of the body, and no-one would ever know of the alien's death.

"Transportation of supplies complete, Captain."

"Very well, Mr. Sulu. Take us out of orbit. Set course for Starbase 4, warp one."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Sulu's hands darted across the dials in front of him, the Enterprise silently responding to her new orders.

Spock sat very still at his station, his eyes fixed on the screen, watching as the planet shrank smaller and smaller, only at last to wink out of existence. Then the voice returned.

- At last I am free. I have severed my chains to the old ones. -

Painfully, Spock summoned his telepathic skills in an attempt to contact the alien creature within him. But once again the savage voice spoke. - What...you... Alien, are you listening? -

Spock was determined. - Who are you? -

- I am Bork, son of Zukas. But you need not concern yourself. I am here to take over your life. You are going to die, and no-one will ever know. -

The cold hatred in the voice was all too obvious to Spock. Now he was alone with this alien thing - there was no way he could ask for help - he was totally alone. Again Spock asserted the mind link.

- You will not succeed. I will fight you. I can defeat you. -

- You will not. I am Bork. There is nothing I cannot make you do. -

Spock's body wouldn't do what he wanted. He couldn't speak, he couldn't move. All around him the Humans went on with their work, totally unaware that Spock was fighting for his life - and losing.

"Mr. Spock... SPOCK!" The voice cut into his mind, dissolving the link with Bork.

"Yes, Captain?"

Kirk sat back in his command chair, watching his First Officer intently. It was not like Spock to have to be told twice. But he dismissed the thought.

"Mr. Spock, I want a brief report on Krail - and the footprints, to the effect that our sensor readings show no life forms on the planet and we have no theory as to what caused the prints."

Spock nodded. "Yes, sir. I'll start it right away." He got out of his chair and turned to leave. The truth was that Spock was in pain, and it was getting worse. His head throbbed continually and there was a great heat at the back of his eyes. It seemed that the alien was true to his word. It wanted him dead.

Uhura half turned in her chair to face him. "Excuse me, sir."

Spock interrupted her briefly. "Not now, Lieutenant." But Uhura persisted.

"Sir, you did ask me for the analysis of Krail's magnetic core as soon as the science department -"

Spock shouted at her, his voice harsh, snarling. "I said not now!"

All noise on the bridge stopped. Kirk's jaw dropped. Everyone turned to stare at the Vulcan as he walked quickly into the turbolift. As Spock left, Kirk hurriedly closed his mouth. Uhura turned to him in amazement. "What did I say?"

The Captain shook his head. "Can't imagine." He sat regarding the elevator a few seconds longer then came to a decision. Climbing out of the chair he headed for the door. "Mr. Scott, you have the con. I'll possibly be in Mr. Spock's quarters, but I wouldn't bet on it."

As soon as the doors closed behind him a babble of indignant voices broke out in criticism of the absent First Officer.

"Jim!" Kirk halted and turned to face McCoy. The Doctor looked very concerned.

"Yes, Bones, what can I do for you?"

The Doctor hesitated for a few seconds, then he shrugged. "It's Spock. There's something wrong with him. He behaved strangely in the transporter room when we beamed up from Krail, but... Well, I've just spoken to him. I asked if I could help with his report on Krail. He told me to shut up and get out."

Kirk shook his head. "That doesn't sound like him at all, but he's just been shouting at Uhura. Where is he now?"

McCoy indicated a briefing room. "He's in there. I did take a reading on him, Jim. There's nothing physically wrong."

The Captain nodded. That meant he was totally in the dark. He'd just have to hope he asked the right questions.

Since McCoy left, Spock had been sitting alone. Steadily he had continued dictating his report. He watched, slightly distracted as the computer turned his voice into taped words. The Captain would be able to read the report whenever he had the time. A sudden thought struck the Vulcan. The intense pain had gone, and try as he might, he couldn't re-establish contact with Bork. Yet he knew the alien was still there. Perhaps Bork had to rest sometimes. It must be a considerable strain, trying to maintain such mental pressure on his host. A new hope rose in the Vulcan. If he spoke to Kirk the pain would come back. But suppose he left a written message? That Bork understood written symbols was highly unlikely - especially if they were Vulcan symbols.

Quickly, the Science Officer disengaged the computer and changed the keyboard from English to Vulcan symbols. He typed a brief, two-word message. It was all he dared to write. Deep inside his mind, Bork was coming to life once more. When the Captain came into the room, Spock's pain was already twice as bad as before. The Vulcan began to stand, but Kirk signalled him to remain seated.

"Spock, within these last thirty minutes or so you have behaved totally out of character. You have jumped down the throats of two people. I would like to know why."

Spock sat still. He would not - could not - respond. At that moment his surroundings looked very unreal to him, and his concentration was wandering. He was remembering a time long past, when he was surrounded by tall green trees and the sky was two different shades of grey. The Human hand on his shoulder awakened him from his dream and brought him back to harsh reality. It had been Bork's memory, not his. That was what Krail had looked like many years ago. And now Bork was making his escape.

"Spock, if there is something wrong, please tell me. I'd like to help."

The Vulcan looked into the Human's eyes, hoping Kirk would sense his pain. But Kirk was Human and insensitive to telepathic feelings. Bork took control of Spock and shook his head. "I am sorry if I have disturbed you, Captain. There is nothing wrong."

Something in the Vulcan's voice disturbed Kirk. His friend seemed harsh, abrupt. But Spock found he had control again and this time Kirk found that the Vulcan's quiet, gentle tones were back.

"I have the report you wanted on Krail, Captain. It is not very long. May I suggest that you read it now?"

Kirk took the tape that Spock held out to him. He glanced down at it in his hands for a few seconds then turned and walked towards the door. Half way he stopped and turned to face his friend once more. "Spock, if I ask McCoy to give you a full medical examination, would you object?"

Spock expected the alien to complain but the mind link stayed broken - only the pain persisted. "No, sir, I would not object."

Kirk sighed. Obviously the compromise of McCoy's examination would have to do, but he tried once more. "If something was wrong, you would come to me, wouldn't you?"

Spock spoke very carefully. "I would let you know, Jim."

When the Captain left, the pain became twice as severe as before. The Science Officer thought for a while and decided to go to his quarters. Perhaps Bork would let him rest.

The door closed quietly behind him and once again Spock was alone with the alien creature. In his confusion he still had his tricorder with him. It was as he was setting it down that the voice spoke to him again.

- Are you tired? -

The question startled him. - Why do you ask? -

Again the voice came. - Soon you will be exhausted. -

- Why? -

Bork's reply was both harsh and cruel. - I am going to tear your soul apart. -

Instantly, the pain became almost unbearable, even for a Vulcan. All the horrors of the Universe, all the worst pain he had ever experienced, were thrust upon Spock by the thing inside him. The Vulcan collapsed in agony, but still Bork couldn't wrench a single scream from Spock.

James T. Kirk sat deep in thought as he slowly pushed the button in front of him to turn the mechanical page. Sometimes when he wasn't sure what to do he would turn to the classics. On this occasion the viewing screen in his quarters held one of Tennyson's poems, 'In Memoriam'. As the Enterprise moved steadily through the star cluster, Kirk was totally absorbed in the poem.

'The path by which we twain did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Thro' four sweet years arose and fell,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow...

But where the path we walked began
To slant the fifth autumnal slope,
As we descended following Hope,
There sat the Shadow fear'd of man;'

"Uhura to Captain Kirk."

The Captain jumped at the sudden interruption. He touched a switch. "Yes, Lieutenant."

"I have a message from Mr. Thomson on Krail, sir. He thought you might like to know that the footprints you saw have vanished and no new ones have appeared. If I may say so, Captain," she added, "it appears the Yeti have flown."

Kirk laughed. "More likely Thomson's just impatient. After all, it hasn't been that long since we left. Still, thank him for the information. Kirk out."

With difficulty, he drew his attention back to the poem, but his mood had been broken. The next two verses shattered it completely.

'Who broke our fair companionship
And spread his mantle dark and cold,
And wrapt thee formless in the fold,
And dull'd the murmur on thy lip,

And bore thee where I could not see
Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste,
And think, that somewhere in the waste,
The Shadow sits and waits for me.'

The screen went blank. For his present mood the poem was too depressing.

He was still worried about Spock. Something was definitely wrong and it upset Kirk that his friend didn't want to tell him about it. Kirk shook his head. What he needed was something to bring him back to normality.

He removed the poem and inserted Spock's report on Krail. Quickly, he glanced over it, not taking in much since the report was only routine. Only routine - yet when he saw what had been typed at the end of the report, his nerves began to tingle. Kirk was pretty hopeless at speaking the Vulcan language and Spock had often despaired of him. But with the reading of Vulcan, Kirk was in his element. There was no mistaking the meaning of the words. As if in a dream he saw the expression on the Vulcan's face when he had questioned him earlier, and this time, he understood. In Spock's eyes he had been looking at desperation - perhaps loneliness. What was it he had asked him - 'If something was wrong, you would come to me, wouldn't you?' The Vulcan's quiet reply echoed in his mind. 'I would let you know, Jim.' And that was exactly what he had done. He had let him know with two words, quickly written in Vulcan - "Tal Hi" -

- "Help me!"

After much searching he found the Vulcan on the observation deck. He was standing very still against the wall, his eyes fixed on the panorama visible through the transparent screen. Kirk's relief at finding his friend took a sudden downward plunge. Spock's usually bright eyes were dull and weary. His skin was far from its normal colour, in fact he looked a lot paler than an average Human

"Spock!"

There was no reply. He gripped the Vulcan by the shoulders and shook him. "Spock, for God's sake look at me!"

Spock sighed, yet his eyes remained fixed on the screen; but when he spoke, his voice was soft.

"Look out there," he whispered. "The star fields in Sagittarius. Thousands and thousands of stars - so many they appear to shine as one. I never thought the Universe could be so beautiful."

Kirk was amazed. "What are you saying? What's wrong?"

The Vulcan frowned, and his gaze shifted from the star field to Kirk's eyes. The frown turned to a look of puzzlement, then one of contempt. Kirk saw the expression, and it horrified him. He gasped, partly in disbelief and partly in pain as Spock's right hand struck him full in the face. Staggering against the wall, Kirk grabbed for his phaser, but a Vulcan's reflexes are far quicker. Spock rushed the Captain and pinned him to the transparent screen. As Kirk struggled to free himself, the Vulcan began to laugh - a vicious, cruel laugh. "You cannot escape me, Human. I have decided and I shall have this Starship."

Kirk found it difficult to speak. All he said was, "Spock...how?"

Again the Vulcan laughed as he sent Kirk crashing to the floor. "Spock... I am not Spock. I have destroyed this body's original host. I am Bork, son of Zukas, last one of Krail's children." Then he was gone, the door snapping shut.

Kirk stayed where he was for a few stunned moments as he thought over the day's events. The truth dawned on him with the force of a supernova. There had been a creature on Krail - but it wasn't on Krail any more. It was on board the Enterprise within Spock's body. At the moment, Kirk's despair was absolute.

Spock was dead.

McCoy leaned back in his chair. He found the situation quite unreal, yet he knew the Captain's story was all too possible. Such things had been known on board the Enterprise before - but never with such brutal harshness. Sadly enough, the incident had been confirmed by the tricorder Kirk had found in Spock's

quarters. While the two men had been standing in the building on Krail, it had recorded a burst of energy, lasting only a fraction of a second it was true, but it was there, and the computer confirmed that it had been absorbed by Spock. The computer also confirmed that there was no possible way of reversing the process. Suddenly, the Universe seemed a vast, empty place to Leonard McCoy. He leaned forward and pushed a button.

"McCoy to Captain Kirk."

"I'm on the bridge, Bones."

McCoy glanced at the man on the screen, then looked away quickly. The hurt on Kirk's face was more than he could bear. "I'm in my quarters, Jim. Will you come and see me? There's something I have to tell you."

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No."

Kirk nodded. When McCoy was as definite as that, he was worth listening to. "I'll be right there."

The screen went blank.

The Doctor rose and paced the room. The Captain had ordered Security to search for the Vulcan but the full story had not been explained to them. Only he and the Captain knew of Bork's existence. The crew merely thought that Spock was insane. Then there was the Captain's private agony - he believed Spock to be dead. McCoy had to tell him now that Spock was alive.

The buzzer sounded. McCoy went to the door and opened it.

Kirk looked tired, but determined. "Bones, whatever it is, make it quick. I've got to go and look for him." His voice held great hatred.

McCoy spoke quietly. "You don't have to look any more, Jim. I know exactly where he is."

Kirk seemed to become even more determined and his voice was harsh. "Where? Where is he?"

McCoy stood aside and nodded inside his room. "He's in there."

"He's what?" Kirk pushed past the surgeon, his mind in a whirl. Didn't Bones realise Bork was a killer? He drew his phaser.

"Jim!" Kirk heard McCoy's desperate plea from a distance. The hand that held the phaser fell limp at his side. He stared with feelings of relief and despair at the sleeping figure on the bed. Relief, because he knew instinctively that this really was Spock - he didn't have to wake him or speak to him - he just knew. And despair, because he didn't know how to help him. There was no way he could set him free. He sat on the edge of the bed, unmoving. Gradually he became aware of McCoy.

"He's exhausted, Jim. But he was able to tell me that Bork has reached the limit of his power. He can't force Spock out of his body. But neither can Spock force Bork out. Their strength is equal and Bork can't exist anywhere without a body except Krail. And as we know, Jim, Krail is a dead world."

Kirk sighed. Spock's fate seemed well and truly sealed. He had to live with a demon tearing at his mind for the rest of his life. Kirk leaned over to the intercom. "Mr. Chekov, plot a course back to Krail. Warp seven."

Chekov's puzzlement was obvious. "Krail, Captain?"

"Yes, Mister, back to Krail."

"Warp seven's going it a bit, Jim."

"We have to, Bones. I don't know what we're going to do, but if Krail is the only place Bork can leave Spock's body, then we are obviously going to have to be there."

"But what if we can't get Bork to leave? Krail is dead."

Kirk turned to watch the sleeping Vulcan. "If we fail, there's only one other thing I can do for Spock." His voice sank to a whisper. "I'll have to kill him."

Sulu glanced at the screen and then at the dials on the board in front of him. Satisfied, he signalled the transporter room.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk."

"Yes, Mr. Sulu."

"We've achieved standard orbit around Krail, sir."

"Very well. Maintain your position." Kirk turned away from the intercom to face the group of security guards who were trying desperately to keep Spock in one place. Obviously Bork knew where they were and it was pretty clear that he wanted to be somewhere else.

Scott was at the controls, carefully checking the settings. Along with the bridge crew he was now completely aware of the situation and he realised the landing party might need to beam up in a hurry if they did set Spock free.

Kirk studied the battle that was still going on and decided the sooner they beamed down the better. The four security guards might just lose.

"Are you ready, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir. You'll beam down at the position you left Mr. Thomson's team."

"Very well. Security detail! Dr. McCoy?"

McCoy joined Kirk in the transporter. The security detail had some difficulty, however, since Spock was making it quite clear that he wanted to go the other way. But they finally managed to pin him to the platform by a remarkable piece of engineering. The two largest guards sat on him.

"Energise."

Scott sighed with relief as the landing party vanished. Silence really was golden.

A few seconds later, however, and the planet's surface became more noisy than it had been for several centuries. The four guards were yet again occupied by the Vulcan whose great strength was increased by Bork's violent emotion. But Kirk had noticed a change in the alien's attitude. No longer was Bork motivated by his savage contempt for the Humans around him. In Spock's face - Bork's face - Kirk saw great fear. He had a sudden idea.

"Let him go."

"Sir?" The security chief couldn't have been more surprised if the Captain had ordered them to kiss Spock.

"You understand English, Chief? Let him go!"

He did so, but for both Spock and Bork, the battle had only begun. The Vulcan was on his knees, his hands clutching at his head. He screamed - and the voice was Bork's. "Barbarian! Why won't you die?"

Kirk knelt in front of him, his voice harsh. "Bork, we don't want you on our ship. Leave that body. You have no right to murder."

The Vulcan seemed a good deal calmer, but it was still Bork who answered. It was only one word, but it destroyed all hope in Kirk, for it was a final answer, of that there was no doubt.

"Never."

They were perhaps fifty feet away from the cliff edge, at the very place

Spock had stood and admired the view only a few days before. And Spock knew it. He also knew the one thing that might possibly drive Bork out of his body. It might work, it might not, but there was one certainty. He couldn't live with the intense pain Bork was inflicting on him. The mental agony was tremendous.

Of what happened next, Kirk was never very sure, except that at that moment, he knew Bork had lost. It was Spock who turned to face the cliff, and it was Spock who suddenly started running faster and faster towards the edge. Kirk could only stand and watch in horror as his friend reached the brink of the cliff - and finally disappeared over it.

Kirk felt something snap in the pit of his stomach. He had just lived through his worst nightmare and his mind refused to believe it. Griefstricken, he sank to his knees, staring in disbelief at the silver translucent cloud that had risen from the cliff edge. It hovered for the briefest of seconds - then it was gone. From far away, they heard the sound of a large, demented creature, crashing through the dead forest. Then there was silence.

McCoy came rushing to the Captain, his concern for Kirk mingling with his own grief at their loss of Spock. But Kirk pushed him gently aside. He could never explain how he knew what he did...he just knew. Climbing to his feet, he hurried to the cliff and looked over the edge.

"Jim! How much longer are you going to be? I can't hang on here indefinitely."

Kirk stared in relief at the Vulcan kneeling on the narrow ledge on the cliff face. Yet all he could do was to turn to the puzzled group behind him and ask,

"Will someone please fetch the Commander a rope?"

Johnston the security chief stood in front of Kirk's command chair. He was finding the Captain difficult to talk to. "Mr. Thomson is quite angry at being ordered to leave Krail, sir. He wants to talk to you."

"Chief, you are making my life a misery."

"Yes, sir... What will you tell him?"

Kirk considered carefully. "You can tell him what you like, but I don't want to see him. Now vanish, before I set Mr. Spock on you again." Johnston vanished.

Kirk got up and walked over to stand beside his First Officer. "Spock, one question."

"Yes, sir?"

"If Bork was such a scientific genius, who was he so primitive?"

After a few moments of thought, Spock replied. "His mind was highly developed, but his body was not. The Yeti's hands were imperfect. They could not grip, therefore the physical building of a civilisation was impossible. The only thing they could do was to kill each other. Humanity was once like that, Jim, but in the opposite sense. It seemed that at one time the only thing your race could do with their minds was to kill. Their limited scientific knowledge enabled them to build bigger and more efficient weapons. But thankfully the dawning of the 'Space Age' provided a more worthwhile cause for their science."

Kirk nodded. "Yes, but what of Bork?"

"He is dead."

"Really? How do you know?"

Spock was silent for a while, then... "I know." He turned in his chair so that no-one else but Kirk could see the look of agony and horror on his face. There was also a faint flicker of sadness, but Kirk knew why. Bork had been a lonely creature, seeking liberation from a dead world - and the company of others. Spock had understood. But then the instant had gone, and Spock was himself again.

But neither he nor Kirk ever forgot the very last Yeti of all.



THE STORM

The Enterprise was making her way back to Starbase Four after a routine but very exhausting mission, so that the crew could have a short but well-earned rest. Captain Kirk sat back in his command chair, relaxing while his crew carried out their duties with the efficiency that had made the Enterprise the best ship in the Fleet.

Suddenly, Commander Spock looked more intently into the scanner, and then raised his head as he turned towards Kirk. "Captain, sensors indicate the approach of an ion storm."

"How serious is it, Mr. Spock?"

"It will be upon us inside fifteen minutes, sir," Spock replied evenly, as if the proximity of an ion storm was an every-day event.

Kirk nodded acknowledgement, reflecting how easy it was to appear imperturbable when his First Officer always remained so calm, whatever the danger. "Standard procedure," he ordered. He wondered who was on top of the duty roster, to draw the dangerous task of manning the observation pod, his mind involuntarily going back to the day when it had fallen to Ben Finney.

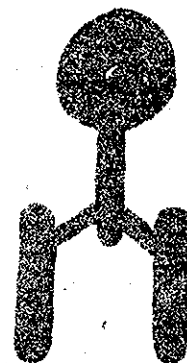
The alert light was flashing yellow now, warning the crew of the impending danger. For a few minutes things continued as normal, while only Spock's alert position as he bent over the scanner showed, along with the flashing light, that anything was wrong. Then the Enterprise shuddered as the leading edge of the storm hit her.

The buffeting, slight at first, gradually increased in severity.

"Charge building up to intolerance level in the pod," Spock warned.

"Evacuate pod," Kirk ordered, his finger poised over the button to jettison the pod the moment it was empty. Several seconds passed, then Uhura reported, "Ensign Walsh reports pod empty, sir."

With an inner sigh of relief, Kirk pressed the button, feeling rather as bomb experts might have done centuries before after successfully defusing a bomb.



"Pod has failed to detach, Captain!" There was the faintest trace of strain in Spock's voice.

"What?!!!" Kirk pressed the jettison button again.

"Still attached, Captain."

Kirk agitated the button frantically, aware that there was nothing else he could do. If the electric charge in the pod reached a certain critical level, the Enterprise herself would be in great danger.

"Released, Captain." Spock's voice was cut off sharply as the ship jerked to a violent shock. Standing as he was, he had no opportunity to save himself but went flying. Other crew members were flung violently from their seats.

Kirk lay still for a moment gathering his thoughts. The pod had broken free just in time, he realised. The charge building up inside it had reached the critical point and it had exploded, too near the Enterprise for comfort. However, it could have been worse.

He began to push himself up, and bit back an involuntary yelp of pain at the sharp stabbing agony in his side. The sensation was one he had experienced before - he knew that he had at least one broken rib and that unless he was very careful the broken end could very easily penetrate a lung. Someone came to help him. He glanced up, expecting to see that it was Spock, only to discover that it was Chekov. The ensign helped him into the command chair.

"Report, Mr. Spock." It was an automatic request. Only when it failed to produce an answer did anyone realise that Spock still lay where he had fallen, out cold. Kirk made an automatic movement to go to him, but the renewed stab of pain convinced him that it would be unwise. "Lieutenant, call Dr. McCoy," he ordered. "Then get me a damage report."

"Aye, sir." Uhura turned her attention to her console. After a minute, she looked back. "Mr. Scott reports serious damage to the warp engines, sir. He recommends cutting warp drive and operating on impulse power only while he effects repairs."

Warp drive damaged - operate on impulse power only in this storm? Kirk only half registered that the rest of the ship had escaped with relatively little damage while he considered the implications and the problems that would arise. The ship would be unable to make any headway against the storm, she might even be carried along with it, only able to maintain the minimum of stability. Kirk's every instinct rebelled at leaving himself so helpless, but he realised that he had no choice. If Mr. Scott felt it had to be done, under these circumstances, it had to be done. Wearily, he punched the intercom button.

"Cut warp drive, Scotty."

"Aye, Captain."

The ship was flung sideways by the force of the storm before Sulu managed to steady her. Strain showed clearly on the helmsman's face as he fought the controls.

The elevator doors slid open and McCoy entered, two orderlies close behind him. He was rubbing his head.

"Next time you decide to shake the ship up, you might give the crew a word of warning," he growled.

He went to the prone Vulcan and ran a scanner over him. Kirk watched anxiously, torn between concern for his ship and concern for his friend. The slight tightening of McCoy's lips was warning enough that something was seriously wrong.

"What's wrong with him, Bones?" Kirk asked as the surgeon straightened up.

McCoy directed the orderlies to take Spock to sickbay. Then he turned to Kirk.

"He has a fractured skull. There is some depression - I'll have to operate to relieve the pressure. Unfortunately, Vulcan healing abilities won't work on this particular injury, because the fracture is right over the spot that controls that ability. This time, he'll have to depend on me. What about you, Jim? Uhura said you were hurt too."

"Think I've cracked a rib," Kirk said off-handedly. McCoy wasn't fooled. He checked the Captain's rib cage.

"Two ribs broken, and severe bruising," he said seriously.

"They'll have to wait, Bones," Kirk said quietly. "There's no-one to take over. Spock's unconscious and Scotty's needed in Engineering. I can't hand over to a junior in these conditions. I'll take it easy, but I must stay on the bridge."

McCoy looked at Kirk unhappily, knowing that the Captain was right. "I'll send someone up to strap your ribs," he said, resignedly.

The strapping brought some relief, but it was undoubtedly simplest to sit as still as possible in order to minimise the pain. Unfortunately, that was not easy to do, as the continued turbulence of the ion storm shook the ship, often violently, and its occupants had to tense their muscles and strain their bodies as they fought, sometimes vainly, to remain in their seats. Without warp power, the ship could make no headway, no attempt to fight her way out of the path of the storm. And as Kirk had feared, she was in fact being carried backwards, slowly, by the increasing force of the storm.

A slow hour passed. Kirk became increasingly worried; surely McCoy had finished with Spock by now! Surely he knew how anxiously Kirk would be waiting for news of his First Officer's condition!

Chekov, from his assumed position at the library computer, said tensely, "Captain, we're being drawn backwards faster. It's as if we've been caught in the gravity field of a giant star - but Captain, there's nothing there."

Kirk felt the blood draining from his face and the sudden rush of adrenalin that made his heart beat faster. He had heard of such phenomena, so rare that he had never thought to encounter one. And it had to be now, of all times, with a disabled ship caught helplessly in the grip of an ion storm, and his Science Officer injured, that he should do so. A gravity well!

"Lieutenant - " he began.

"I'm sorry, sir," Uhura said, before he had time to continue. "There's no way I could push a signal through the static."

No, Kirk thought fiercely. The Enterprise isn't going to become just a statistic, one of the ships that vanish without trace! There must be a way out.

Although he knew that Scotty would be working at top speed and would tell him as soon as the engines were ready, he punched the intercom button.

"Kirk to Engineering."

There was a brief pause before an answer came.

"Scott here." The engineer sounded strangely weary.

"How's it going, Scotty?"

"We'll be almost an hour yet, Captain. There were a lot of wee components damaged, and it's a slow job replacing them."

In an hour, the Enterprise would be inextricably caught and trapped in the gravity well. He had to think of a means of escape long before that. If only he could call on Spock for advice!

The Enterprise shook violently once more as she was flung sideways by a sudden eddy. Kirk was thrown hard against the arm of his chair, and gasped at the pain

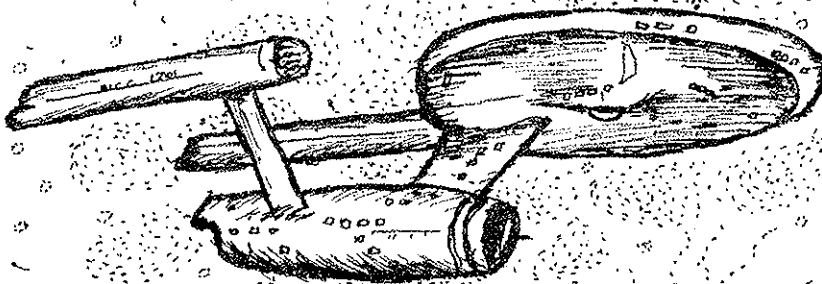
from his broken ribs. Every breath he drew thereafter was agonising.

There had to be some means of escape from this trap. Had to be. Kirk racked his brains while the overworked impulse engine strained to hold the Enterprise in position against the ever-increasing pull of the gravity well.

In sickbay, McCoy fought for Spock's life, hampered by the frequent, irregular jolting. The sweat of extreme tension beaded his face, and he was forced to call one of the junior nurses to stand by with a swab to dry his face every few minutes. This was even worse than a previous occasion in which he had performed a vital operation on a Vulcan, for the storm had already lasted much longer than the Orion attack had done. Besides, the heart is a surprisingly resilient organ, far more so than the brain. A slip in a heart operation might be repairable, but in a brain operation - if such a slip didn't kill Spock, it could well do worse, damaging his brain and leaving him at best insane, at worst an idiot, able to remember that he had been brilliant but completely unable to remember his previous knowledge - or relearn it. With an effort, McCoy forced his mind away from the discouragement of this thought, and concentrated on his hands.

A very similar thought had entered his Captain's head. Suppose, it said, that Spock has died? That Bones was thrown off-balance at the wrong moment and Spock's brain injured so severely that it killed him? If that happened, Bones might decide to wait until the storm was past to report it.

Resolutely, Kirk refused to consider the possibility, and concentrated on the



problem of escaping from the trap the ship was in.

Speed was the only thing that might help - and speed was the one thing they didn't have. Unless -

"Mr. Sulu - one hundred and eighty degrees about. Head straight for the centre of the gravitational pull. On my order, sharp port ninety degrees."

"Aye, sir."

The starship swung round, far less gracefully than normally due to the steady buffeting of the storm, and began to move closer to the invisible gravity source, slowly at first then with ever-increasing speed as the pull intensified. Faster and faster - she reached the speed of light, then passed it, and still Kirk waited. Faster, faster, until -

"Now, Mr. Sulu! Port ninety degrees!"

The ship's bodywork groaned in protest as she turned on to the new course. The gravity well pulled at her. Sheer impetus drove her on, however, for a good distance before the force of gravity slowed her sufficiently to overcome her attempted escape and draw her steadily backwards again.

"Position, Mr. Chekov."

"We have gained nearly five thousand kilometers, Captain," Chekov replied.

"Not enough to break free, though," Kirk commented. However, he was reasonably satisfied with the result of his experiment. He could repeat the maneuver as necessary until the warp drive was repaired, then use the extra speed of the warp engines to break free altogether.

Kirk eased himself back in his chair, trying vainly to find a comfortable position. Now that the engines were repaired and the ship out of danger, he was free to seek attention for his own injury - but the thought of the interminably long trip to sickbay was off-putting. At least here he could sit still, where it only hurt when he breathed.

The elevator door slid open, and McCoy entered. The surgeon looked tired but cheerful, and Kirk felt the last of the tension drain from his body.

"Spock?" Although he knew the question was not needed, he was unable to refrain from asking it.

"He'll be O.K. The operation took a lot out of him, though, it took much longer than it should have done, and he'll have to stay in sickbay for a bit, of course. Now, what about you?"

"Pretty sore," Kirk admitted.

"Hmm." McCoy checked the injury. "What have you been doing, Jim? This is much worse than it was."

"Hit it off the chair," Kirk said.

McCoy nodded. "Uhura, get sickbay to send a trolley up. You're relieved of duty, Captain, on medical grounds. You're going to spend the next two days in bed."

"It's not that bad, Bones - "

"If you think I want a patient as restless as you cluttering up my sickbay, you can think again," McCoy told him. "I'll throw you out just as soon as I think it advisable.. For the moment - you're confined to bed - in sickbay."

Kirk grinned. "Yes, sir!"

McCoy was not fooled. "And you'll be good. Or else - !"

"You like having us both in sickbay," Kirk accused.

"No, I don't - but at least when you're there I know you're not doing anything silly."

The elevator door slid open again to reveal the medical trolley. McCoy supported Kirk on to it.

"Take the con, Mr. Sulu," Kirk said as he was wheeled out. He lay back and relaxed. He would never admit it, of course, but it would be pleasant to lie back and rest for a couple of days, especially with Spock to keep him company.

As the door slid shut behind the Captain, Sulu grinned over at Chekov.

"Come on, Chekov - let's get back to Starbase Four as soon as possible."

"Course laid in, Mr. Sulu."

And the Enterprise headed for home.

HARP STRINGS by Janet E. C. Hall.

Harp strings, speak for him tonight.

In that nebulous non-time
Between the end of one day
And the start of the next,
When he can call the hours his own,
Give him the means to freedom denied him
During the working day.
Be the voice
For his human half which demands expression;
For to his Vulcan half
Words of emotion are taboo;
Face, tone, posture - all must be
Quite neutral.
Yet inside
The thwarted feelings
Cry out and must be heard;
Harp strings, be their vehicle tonight.

Through you he can reveal
That which openly he must deny possessing:
The satisfaction of a job well done;
The relief when a demanding situation is resolved;
The pleasure of friendship; the fear
Of failure, unacceptance or rebuff;
The pain of a jibe or taunt, from
A thoughtless word meant in jest;
The loneliness, the bitter aching void;
The homesickness with no chance of resolution;
The uncertainty of not knowing;
The caring; the compassion;
The quiet love.
Through you he can say,
To a world which doesn't listen
And couldn't understand,
What otherwise he could only think.
Reach out, communicate -
Touch the hearts of those who
Otherwise would pass unheeding by.

Harp strings, don't let him down:
Speak for him tonight.

PREJUDICE by Sheila Clark

The Enterprise was on her way to Starbase 12 with a load of medical supplies when she received a distress call from the research vessel Mendel.

The Mendel's position was such that the Enterprise didn't have to be diverted far in order to reach her. She was operating short-handed; at her last planet-fall, there had been a race inimical to strangers, and the landing party had been attacked without warning. Only the vigilance of the Captain had prevented a massacre; but in the confusion, the ship's nurse had been killed, trying to help an injured man who had also died. Many of the crew were hurt, some badly, and they were so short-handed that even the injured were having to take their turn on duty. The badly hurt were in a particularly bad way, as the Mendel now had no medical staff - she was such a small vessel that she only carried a nurse, albeit a highly qualified one.

Kirk transferred several men to assist the decimated crew, took the most severely injured on board, and left Nurse Chapel with the Mendel to see to those who, though injured, preferred to remain aboard their own ship. He was forced to leave the Mendel to her own resources thereafter, as the supplies he carried had to be got to Starbase 12 as soon as possible, but the Mendel's Captain was certain that he could manage, with the men Kirk left him, to gain port under his own steam.

At Starbase 12, when they eventually reached it, was a surprise for McCoy. His daughter was there; waiting for transport back to Earth. She had finished a tour of duty on a survey ship, and was now going back to Earth for advanced training - she had her eye on promotion.

After the first joy of reunion, McCoy turned to Kirk and Spock, who were waiting, more or less patiently, for McCoy to remember they were there. Kirk especially was intrigued; McCoy had said very little about his daughter even to them, and he was glad of the opportunity to meet her. Spock, little less curious, hid it better.

"Jim - Spock - my daughter Joanna. Jo, Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock. I've told you about them in my letters."

Kirk smiled welcomingly at her. "Hello, Jo. I may call you Jo?"

She ignored the question. "Hello, Captain," she said coolly. "Mr. Spock."

Spock looked at her, vaguely disturbed by something in her attitude, wondering if, in the manner of many Earth people, she was shy. "You must be happy to see your father again after so long," he said.

"Yes, it has been a long time," McCoy said. He was conscious of a degree of awkwardness, and then realised that it must be difficult for these people that he loved, meeting as strangers, to match his happiness.

"When are you going to Earth, Jo?" he asked.

"I have to wait for transport," she said. "I don't know yet."

"Well, we'll be here for a few days," Kirk put in. "Bones, we'll not need you while we're here - see as much of Jo as you can. It may be long enough before you see each other again."

He turned away. "Coming, Spock?"

They moved away, leaving McCoy and his daughter alone. Joanna promptly unfroze.

"Dad, it is good to see you," she said.

He looked at her. "Jo...what was wrong there?"

She didn't pretend not to understand. "I know they're your friends, Dad; but I didn't like them."

"Why not?"

She hesitated. "No real reason...except...I've a friend here, who used to know Captain Kirk. She said he's a real wolf...always chasing up girls. Well, I'm not going to be a ~~another~~ trophy on his wall."

McCoy shook his head. "Oh, he does flirt a bit - what man doesn't? If he gets a 'come-on' from a pretty girl. I do myself. Of course, Spock wouldn't recognise a 'come-on' if it jumped up and bit him," he grinned, trying to change the subject. But Jo wasn't amused.

"I'm sorry, Dad," she said again. "I've nothing against Vulcans in general, either, but...you've made him out to be so...so..." She broke off, unable to put her feelings into words.

McCoy looked unhappily at her. "Jo, they're the best friends a man could hope for. Loyal, trustworthy... They've both saved my life at the risk of their own, more than once. I hoped you would think of them as friends too. Give them a chance, Jo. Don't let yourself be blinded by prejudice. Please."

"I'm sorry, Dad. I'll try, but..."

"It's all you can do."

Meanwhile, Kirk and Spock, unaware of McCoy's problems, were making their way to the Base Commander's office, where orders might be awaiting them. The Commander was an old acquaintance, having been there some years.

"Hello, Jim...Spock," he said. "Don't tell me that you've left McCoy behind somewhere."

Kirk laughed. "No, Dick. I bet you know as well as we do that his daughter is here. We left him talking to her."

"Well, he'll get plenty chance to see her in the next few weeks, Jim. Starfleet's being generous and humane for once. Your orders take you back to Earth for a refit - there are some improved components they're fitting to Starships, and you're being ordered back one by one to get them. And since you're the first ship going back to Earth from here - you take Nurse McCoy."

"Are these components really improved, or are they still being tested?" Kirk asked, his experience with M-5 still fresh in his mind, even although many months had passed since that ill-fated experiment.

"Really improved. You're the fourth ship to get them - none of the other Captains has complained."

"Well, it'll make a change for the crew to get shore leave on Earth," Kirk commented.

"They'll get quite a good leave, too. The refit will take several weeks because they're taking the opportunity to check out everything, and from what I've heard, Starfleet will be quite happy if only the non-Humans in the crew are left on duty."

"I know one officer who won't go on leave until he knows his precious engines are safely back in one piece," Kirk laughed.

The commander laughed with him; even Spock's face relaxed slightly, although only someone who knew him as well as Kirk did would have noticed it. Then the commander added,

"Oh, by the way - Spock, there's a package for you. Came to be sent on to you as soon as possible."

Spock took it with a nod of thanks, but didn't open it. It was almost as if he already knew what was in it.

They went back to where they had left McCoy. He and Jo were no longer there, but inquiry elicited the information that they had gone to the canteen for a meal. Kirk and Spock followed. Not that there was any real urgency, but Kirk wanted to let McCoy know as soon as possible that Jo was to accompany them back to Earth. Yet, when they eventually ran McCoy to ground and told him, he seemed strangely subdued about it. After a moment, though, he seemed to get over what was bothering him and said heartily, "Starfleet must have a heart after all."

Kirk and Spock went back to the Enterprise straight away, leaving the McCoys to finish their meal. Spock excused himself as soon as they boarded, and went off to his own quarters.

He did indeed know what was in the package he had been given. He opened it, studied the letter it contained as a cover for the other contents.

"... as you know, you are a beneficiary under the terms of the will of your grandfather, Alexander Grayson. There are certain difficulties in arranging the transfer of property, since you are a Vulcan national. We would be obliged if you would study the enclosed documents at your leisure, and..." It went on as he knew it would. He had been expecting this for some time, ever since he heard of the death of his Human grandfather almost a year previously. It had, however, come at a reasonably propitious time. He could afford time just now to study these legal documents; he was sure they would not be easy to follow, even for him; and then get time off during the refit to visit the lawyers. And since McCoy's daughter was aboard, Kirk would have other things to think about in his spare time than chess; McCoy would have other things to think about than their perpetual verbal duelling. He would miss the chess and the arguing, and Kirk's and McCoy's company, he admitted to himself, but that couldn't be helped either. These documents, had to be studied. And understood.

For a few days after the Enterprise set course for Earth, everything appeared to be normal. Kirk missed seeing Spock and McCoy around, but he didn't think much of it at first; until one day he happened to be passing sickbay when the door opened - and Scotty came out, laughing. From inside, Kirk could hear McCoy and Joanna laughing with him. As he reached Kirk, Scotty said cheerfully, "Morning, Captain," and passed on.

Kirk hesitated a moment. Should he go in or not? Normally he wouldn't have hesitated - but he couldn't help remembering how distantly polite Joanna was every time he spoke to her. Yet she laughed with Scotty...

He went on.

He was conscious of a nagging feeling of discontent which was rendered all the more disagreeable for being totally unfamiliar. It seemed ages since any of his friends had said anything to him but 'hello'. And Joanna - why was she being so distant? Why was McCoy apparently keeping her away from him? After the first night aboard, McCoy and Joanna had eaten in their quarters...as if McCoy was deliberately keeping her to himself. Kirk hadn't really thought about it - until now. Scotty had been welcome. He wished he could mention it to someone; but one of the two people he could discuss it with was involved, and the other was keeping very much to himself for some reason unknown. With a surge of uncharacteristic impatience, Kirk found himself thinking that Spock had had plenty of time to study whatever had been in the packet he had been given. So why was he still haunting his own quarters? Or was he? Was he also welcome in sickbay?

Well, he wouldn't be petty about it. He could wait until they had recovered from their absorption; he wouldn't let them see that he was bothered.

He stayed on the bridge that day long after his usual watch was past; it wasn't unusual, and the crew who relieved Sulu, Chekov and Uhura didn't know how long Kirk had spent on the bridge. Next day, finding himself wakeful very early, he went on watch early - again, a not unusual occurrence. His usual watchmates

did not know how short a time he had been away from the bridge; and within a couple of days, Kirk found himself spending almost twenty hours a day on duty. In the intervening hours, he lay on his bed, unable to sleep properly, his mind rehearsing over and over possible reasons why his friends should have rejected him...and rejecting all the notions that occurred to him.

Did McCoy not trust him enough to let him share Joanna? McCoy had seen him flirting with several girls; passengers often expected a mild flirtation with one of the officers, and who more flattering to pay them attention than the Captain? But surely McCoy knew that Joanna would be like a daughter to him as well?

The sense of hurt grew; but his pride wouldn't let him go directly to McCoy - or to Spock, whose preoccupation with his parcel was beginning to irritate Kirk in a way unthinkable to him in his normal frame of mind.

It couldn't last, and he knew it. But he was unable to break free from the pattern that had developed in his mind. He stayed on the bridge until he could hardly keep his eyes open; stumbled to his quarters, hoping to be tired enough to sleep, and forget for a few hours the misery that was now overwhelming him; and lay awake, unable to sleep, when he eventually did lie down. Next morning, a repeat of the pattern; and the next. He could have broken it any time; a word would have been enough; he knew it - but he would not say that word, and sat in his command chair, forcing himself to behave normally so that Spock would not notice anything wrong, and yet bitterly hurt that Spock didn't notice.

He got more and more tired. It was as well that the flight was completely routine; he felt that his judgement was hopelessly gone, and that in an emergency he wouldn't be able to make the right decisions... He knew he would have to speak to Spock soon, but he didn't want to. He wanted Spock to speak to him about it... no. He simply wanted Spock to speak to him...

That night, he found himself stumbling badly on his way back to his cabin, almost falling in his exhaustion. Ahead of him, he heard McCoy's voice, Joanna's, Scotty's... Pride stiffened his back in a way nothing else could, he walked erect, firmly, as he passed them, and even managed to smile. He didn't see McCoy turn after he had passed, to look at him, a slight frown on his face.

"What's wrong, McCoy?" Scotty asked.

"I'm not sure. Jim's looking tired... Spock mentioned to me this afternoon that he thought Jim wasn't keeping too well. Maybe all he needs is some leave; but I think I'll get him in tomorrow for a checkup, just in case."

The effort to behave normally had been too much for Kirk, however. He entered his cabin - and inside, lost his balance and fell heavily, awkwardly, against the waist-high shelving that acted as a partial partition. His head banged off the shelf; he bounced, and hit his left arm off another part of it; and slumped to the floor, unconscious.

When he didn't show up for duty next morning, Spock called him on the intercom. Receiving no answer, Spock went to Kirk's quarters, and found him still lying on the floor, still unconscious. He promptly called McCoy.

McCoy checked Kirk where he lay.

"Broken arm...several broken or cracked ribs...and a head injury. It could have been worse..."

Since Christine Chapel was still aboard the Mendel, McCoy decided that, as he needed the help of a nurse, Joanna might as well be that nurse. It was as good a chance as any to try to reconcile her to Kirk. He set the broken arm, and gave her the job of cleaning and dressing the gash on Kirk's head where he had hit it off the shelf.

"I wonder what happened?" Spock said, once he was assured that Kirk's injuries, though nasty, weren't too severe.

"He was looking tired when I saw him last night," McCoy said slowly. "I meant to get him in for a checkup today. I'll keep him in for a day or two, give him a chance to get a rest. He needs one - he works harder than any of us."

Spock nodded. "I'll leave you to get on with it, then."

Although he was anxious about Kirk, McCoy decided to leave Joanna to watch him. It would, he thought, give her a chance to get to know Kirk - and the patient-nurse relationship once set up, might solve all his problems. So when Kirk regained consciousness, and realised that he must be in sickbay, it was Joanna he first saw on opening his eyes, and not, as he had hoped, McCoy.

His heart sank. Why wasn't McCoy there? Didn't he care? Kirk had reached a point of depression where the slightest thing had the power to hurt him. He wanted McCoy...or Spock...not Joanna. But again, his pride kept him from asking for them.

"How are you feeling, Captain?" Joanna asked, her voice distantly polite.

He considered the question. How was he feeling? He was feeling unhappy. But he couldn't say that. That wasn't what she was asking.

"My head...aches," he managed slowly, shocked at how difficult it was to say even that without breaking down.

"Have you a headache, or is it just where you banged it that's sore?" she asked impersonally.

"Where I banged it?" he asked stupidly. "Both, I think." This was terrible. Where was McCoy? Or even Nurse Chapel? Oh yes, on the Mendel... He would give anything for a friendly face, a sympathetic voice, not this distant cool competence. He shut his eyes again, to shut out the sight of her professionally calm face. If only he could sleep! Sleep, and wake to find everything back to normal. He shut his lips firmly to hold back the cry that rose to them for McCoy.

He slipped back into unconsciousness. Joanna called for McCoy.

"He came round for a few minutes," she said. "He complained that his head was sore - a headache as well as the pain from the injury, he said - then he lost consciousness again."

McCoy studied the diagnostic board. "He's probably just asleep," he said. "The readings are normal." He glanced round as Spock came in.

"How is he, Doctor?"

"Well, he came round for a minute," McCoy said. "He's asleep again, which is probably a good sign since the readings are normal. You'd better not come down much - if you're here, he'll start asking about the ship, and I'd rather keep him absolutely quiet, with that head injury."

Spock nodded. "I understand, Doctor."

"Don't worry. I'll let you know how he's getting on."

"There is just one thing, Doctor," Spock said. "We'll soon be coming within range of the research colony on the planet Earthmen call Hades. The personnel there will be requiring their annual checkup - For which your services will be required."

"I wasn't forgetting," McCoy told him.

"You will be able to leave the Captain?"

"I think so. Jo can stay with him, monitor his condition. If there's any drastic change, she can call in M'Benga."

Spock left to return to the bridge. McCoy looked at his daughter. "I'd like to take you down to help with the physicals," he said, "It'd be good experience for you, if you're going up for promotion, since you'll be authorised

to conduct these routine physicals on small planetary colonies once you're up a grade. But I daren't leave the Captain without an experienced nurse in attendance, not yet. Not till I'm quite certain he's on the mend."

Joanna nodded, not very happily. She would rather have accompanied McCoy; she had no desire to remain here, watching over a man she didn't like, but she was too professional to say so.

It was several hours before they came within reach of Hades. During that time, Kirk lay unconscious. After a time, he began to toss slightly. Joanna called McCoy.

By the time he came - a matter of seconds - Kirk was tossing restlessly.

"How long has he been like this?" McCoy asked.

"Just a few seconds," Joanna replied nervously. "I called you as soon as he began to fidget."

McCoy shook his head. "I've never seen anything like it before," he said. "Not quite like this..." Joanna drew a relieved breath - she had never seen anything quite like it either, and had been worrying in case she had missed anything. The readings were normal, yet... McCoy made a few more checks.

At last - "He seems to be thinking about something, even in his sleep," McCoy said. "Probably he's just worried about the refit - the last time we got some new equipment, it nearly destroyed the ship - and four others along with her."

He beamed down alone to Hades to conduct the physicals.

He was not long away when Kirk regained consciousness again. He kept his eyes shut, not knowing whether McCoy was there or not, but dreading finding that he was not.

Joanna knew from the readings that Kirk must be awake, and wondered why he didn't open his eyes. She felt a slight twinge of guilt; her expression, when he looked at her before, couldn't have been very encouraging, she knew; she had been briskly competent, but not humane. She had behaved more as she would towards a malingerer, and she knew that Kirk was not malingering. But she also knew that if Kirk opened his eyes now, her expression would be just as coolly discouraging. Deliberately, she moved away. He was awake. If he needed anything, he had only to ask. She sat at McCoy's desk, watching the diagnostic board.

After a while, Kirk summoned up the courage to open his eyes. No, McCoy wasn't there. He was disappointed, even though he hadn't allowed himself to hope. Joanna was watching the board rather than him, but after a moment she became aware of his eyes on her.

"How is your head now?" she asked.

"Better," Kirk lied. Someone was pounding his brain with a sledgehammer. And he felt so tired...physically and mentally. He shut his eyes again. That helped a little. McCoy...where was McCoy?...and Spock...where was he?...did neither of them care? A thread of rational thought assured him that they did, but his weakness made it difficult for anything to exist in his mind but the feeling of rejection...he was so lonely for them... With an effort that left him drained, he held back the tears that threatened. Joanna... He must keep control in front of her. He didn't know her well enough to relax in front of her...

Hades was an uninviting planet, hence the popular name. Its atmosphere was thinner than Earth's and in addition the oxygen content was less, while the gravity was slightly higher. The temperature might have been comfortable for Spock, but McCoy found it enervating. There was, McCoy knew, some native life;

there was a race that, while not intelligent, probably would become so, one day. Because of this race, the planet had not been colonised; even although not inviting, it was livable. All that the Federation had done was set up a small research station, which had been there for some six years. McCoy had never visited it before, and wasn't sure that he even wanted to visit it again.

While he conducted the physicals, he carried out the usual casual conversation with his patients that was designed to let them know, obliquely, what was going on in the Galaxy outside, as well as whether or not any personality clashes were occurring. Starfleet knew as well as any other official body that personal animosities are often hidden in the interests of keeping the quarrel 'within the family'.

Nothing of interest emerged this time - he was hardly surprised, as the profiles on these people had indicated a high degree of compatibility. However, the leader of the group did mention that there had been some disturbance outside the station perimeter during the last few nights.

"It's odd," he went on. "Every year at about this time, there's approximately a week of disturbances among the native creatures. Then everything quiets down again. We've investigated, and found nothing. Yet there must be some reason. Is there any chance of the Enterprise monitoring the area tonight?"

"I think I can say yes to that," McCoy said. He pulled out his communicator. "McCoy to Enterprise."

"Enterprise, Spock here," came the familiar voice of the First Officer.

McCoy passed on the request, and the reason for it.

"Yes, we'll do that," Spock confirmed. "I'll beam down as well, and you and I can investigate from the ground, too."

"Wait a minute, Spock... I'm not sure I like leaving Jim all that long," McCoy protested.

"I checked with sickbay a few minutes ago," Spock said. "Nurse McCoy reports that the Captain has regained consciousness and claims to be feeling better."

So, against his better judgement, McCoy stayed, to be joined by Spock. He did, however, make his own check with Joanna. She told him that Kirk was sleeping again, not quite so restlessly, and that the readings were still all normal.

They set off just before it got dark, heading towards an area where, the research leader said, the disturbances had been very marked the night before. They hadn't got very far when a heavy weight crashed against both of them from behind. When they were allowed to scramble to their feet again, they found themselves facing a group of primitive beings, who looked vaguely baboon-like but were obviously not of anthropoid origin. For one thing, they were not mammalian. The creatures were armed with stones and broken-off branches; there was a cunning look about them - not quite intelligence - yet. But not far removed from it, either. One of the baboons had their phasers and communicators. It handled the things gingerly, as if it were afraid of them.

Another of the creatures, which seemed to be the chief, grunted several times. The baboon with the phasers put them down on a flat rock.

The chief baboon then turned to Spock and McCoy. It grunted; and they found that, while it 'spoke' to them direct, they could understand it.

"In this week of the year, we test our young," it said. "Your people have come to live here, but they have never undergone the testing. This time you have come to us. You will undergo the test. If you succeed, your people will be free to stay. If you fail, your people must go. Go or die."

Spock and McCoy looked at each other. To what extent had the disturbances been bait, to lure someone out to undergo the test? It seemed, too, that they

must also re-think their opinion of the intelligence of the natives.

"What is the test?" Spock asked, looking directly at the chief as he spoke.

"You must survive the night in the forest, without weapons," the chief replied.

Spock nodded. "Very well," he said. "But I alone will undergo the test. Let my companion go."

"No. You must go together. It is the rule. One alone has no chance. We know this. It is a test, not a killing. At least two must go together."

"Come on, Spock," McCoy said. "Let's get started."

A lane opened for them between the natives, a lane which led them in to the open forest. From the darkness beyond came the snarling yelp of some wild creature. McCoy shivered. From what the research personnel had told him, some of the animals here were not the sort of things it was advisable to meet on a dark night.

As they entered the trees, the half-light abruptly faded. The moon would not rise for some time yet, and even when it did, its light would barely be able to penetrate the deep shadows of the forest where, even at noon, the light was dim. It would create small patches of brightness which would disturb their vision, be even more distracting than no light at all.

McCoy found he was having difficulty in breathing and moving, felt as if he was wading through knee-deep water. He knew this was because of the higher gravity and thinner atmosphere...strange that a high gravity planet should have such a thin atmosphere, he thought. Vulcan was much the same.

"How're you doing, Spock?" he gasped.

"It is rather like Vulcan," Spock said, echoing McCoy's thought.

"So you're having no difficulty? I'm glad one of us is O.K."

"I didn't say that, Doctor. On the contrary, I am finding that I have lived for so long in Earth's gravity and atmosphere that I am experiencing a little difficulty. However, I should be able to re-adapt quite quickly."

After a short while, they stopped. "Do we have to keep moving?" McCoy asked. "All they said was survive."

"I suspect that to survive, it is necessary to continue moving," Spock commented. "This planet has several unpleasant carnivores. If we remain still, it would be easy for one to creep up on us."

"And if we move, we might blunder into one," McCoy finished.

Suddenly, both were aware that it was getting subtly lighter. They could at least see faintly where they were.

"The moon?" McCoy asked.

"It must be," Spock agreed. "But how its light can be so effective is beyond my experience." They moved on in the slowly increasing light.

Suddenly the ground gave way beneath McCoy's feet. As he fell, he threw himself backwards. Spock caught at him, just managed to grab his shirt. This steadied McCoy long enough to let him grasp at the edge of the pit into which he had so nearly fallen. Spock changed his hold to McCoy's arms, and pulled him up.

With McCoy on solid ground again, Spock leaned forward over the hole. Beneath, he could just make out two spots of light shining up at him, and shivered, despite the clammy heat that was still in the air. There was some kind of 'trap-door' carnivore below; sheer luck had saved McCoy from becoming its dinner. McCoy knew it too; but the situation was too serious for thanks - at least, just yet. They moved cautiously past the hole, and went on.

After a while, they stopped again for a short rest - something that had

become vital, even for Spock. The Vulcan sat on the ground, leaning back against a tree stump, in such a manner that he was going to have to push against the stump to get up again. McCoy crouched at his feet.

Suddenly the Human stiffened. "Spock...don't move."

"What is it?" he asked quietly.

"A snake of some kind."

It was beginning to loop its way over the stump against which Spock was leaning, its forked tongue nearly touching Spock as it flickered back and forward. It stopped, its head blindly turned towards Spock, who couldn't move without touching it. It began to lean its head towards him.

McCoy stood cautiously, held out his hand. Spock took it.

"After three," McCoy said. "One...two...three...now!" He pulled with the strength of desperation - a strength he didn't realise he could produce in this gravity. Spock lifted to his feet.

The snake paused, tongue flickering where Spock had been. Then it seemed to accept that its prey had gone, and flowed on...and on... and on...

"It probably was not poisonous," Spock said. "But it would have undoubtedly been capable of swallowing me whole. Thank you, Doctor."

They went on, even more watchful now. "I can understand why they insisted that we go together," McCoy said.

"Yes," Spock replied, simply.

When McCoy's return to the Enterprise had been delayed, Joanna hadn't worried too much. But when time went on, and no word came, she risked leaving sickbay to find if there was any word.

What she learned horrified her. McCoy - and Spock, which didn't worry her - had disappeared. They could not be contacted. Even sensors could not detect them.

She managed to retain her self-control until she was back in sickbay. She checked Kirk - he was still sleeping, more restlessly again. Then she sat at the desk, crying, in spite of her attempts to control herself.

After a while, she pulled herself together, and dried her eyes. She got up to go and wash her face; but just as she got to her feet, Kirk moved. Professional concern forced her to move over to him.

Kirk had lain for some minutes again, gathering his courage to open his eyes and face the absence of McCoy. When he did, he looked up into Joanna's tear-streaked face. Forgetting his own troubles for a brief moment, he asked gently,

"What is it?"

She hesitated. Kirk was still very weak. She was sure he was still in pain. McCoy had seemed sure of his affection; if this was accurate, it would only worry him to be told that McCoy was missing. Spock, too...wasn't Spock supposed to be his friend too?

"What is it?" Kirk asked again. He was beginning to look agitated; and she decided that he was probably better to be told.

"Dad...and Mr. Spock...they're missing."

"Missing?" Kirk felt his heart miss a beat. "What happened?"

"We're orbiting Hades. Dad had to go down for physicals..." So that's where he was, Kirk thought, with a slight feeling of relief. "...There was

something going on, and he asked Mr. Spock to go down. They left the research station...and that's all we know. They haven't been heard from since."

"They're together?" Kirk wanted confirmed. She nodded. "Then it's not quite as bad as it might be," he went on reassuringly. "Spock'll look after your father...and Bones'll look after Spock," he added, more to himself.

He struggled to a sitting position. "Where are my clothes?"

"Clothes?"

"You don't think I'll leave them down there without going to look for them?"

"You can't go!" she exclaimed. "You've a head injury, broken arm, broken ribs - you're not fit! You could easily kill yourself!"

"I'll manage. But they may be in danger...needing help...I can't leave them."

"Send down a search party! Dad would never forgive me if I let you do this!"

"If I know Scotty, there's already a search party down there," Kirk said. "But one person might succeed where a party fails. Get me my clothes, nurse. That's an order."

"Medical orders take precedence - "

"When given by a ship's Chief Medical Officer. Which you are not."

She gave in. Slowly, she got his clothes, helped him to dress.

"There's just one thing," she said. "I'm coming with you, Captain."

He shook his head.

"I must. You're ill. I would be failing in my duty if I let you go alone. Besides - it's my father who's lost."

Kirk looked at her, knowing how dangerous this trip could be. She was right, of course; on both counts, she was right.

"All right, nurse," he said. "You can come." He chose not to risk calling her 'Jo' again; she hadn't seemed to like it, and this new rapport was too fragile to risk.

Kyle was not very happy about beaming Kirk down, either; but he had to obey the Captain's orders. They materialised on the edge of the forest. Kirk swung round the tricorder he had brought.

"This way," he said. He led the way through the trees. They also were surprised by the amount of light that the moon gave. It was almost as if the trees were rendered transparent by the moonlight.

After a while, the reading on the tricorder began to get confused. There was no longer any clear indication where Spock and McCoy were. All Kirk knew was the approximate direction.

"This must be why the ship's sensors couldn't find them," Joanna suggested,

Kirk nodded. "I've never seen anything like it," he said.

They moved on. Kirk called, "Spock! Bones!" They stopped, and listened, but they heard nothing.

Spock and McCoy stumbled on through the trees, tired now and hardly caring what happened. It was nearly day; their ordeal would soon be over - officially. Yet they still had to find their way back out of the forest. In actual fact, their ordeal would not be over until they were safely back on the Enterprise.

McCoy moved into the lead as the strange, unearthly light of the moon began to be replaced by the warmer light of day. The light was treacherous; more so

than it had been. There was an open space ahead of them; McCoy speeded up slightly as he saw it. It would be good to get out from under the trees for a few moments, to see the sky above them.

A dozen paces into the open meadow showed him his mistake. He felt himself beginning to sink.

"Stop, Spock! It's a marsh!"

Spock pulled up at the edge of the quagmire. McCoy tried to turn, to wade back, but he was sinking fairly quickly. He was already knee-deep; as he put his weight on one foot to lift the other, the first foot sank more quickly.

Spock waded out, trying to reach him.

"No, Spock! Don't risk it!"

Spock came towards him a little way, but his greater weight caused him to sink almost immediately. He also tried to turn back - and failed. He was trapped too, and McCoy was still beyond his reach.

Suddenly, Spock lifted his head. "Listen!"

McCoy strained his ears, but at first could hear nothing. Then -

"Bones! Spock!"

"It's Jim!"

"A logical assumption, since only he calls you 'Bones'. But when we last saw him, the Captain was not fit to stand, let alone come in search of us on a planet with such a high gravity."

"Jim would have to be dead before he failed us," McCoy said.

Without answering, Spock turned his head towards the direction from which the call had come. "Here, Captain!"

"Spock!" There was horror in McCoy's voice.

Spock glanced round at him. He was looking towards the side. Spock looked over that way. A huge cat-like carnivore was standing there, its tail-tip twitching; looking at them. As they watched it, it put a cautious paw onto the surface of the marsh, then drew back.

"It probably lacks the intelligence to realise that it will not be able to reach us," Spock commented, "but it will be there, waiting, when the Captain comes for us."

Kirk was getting hoarse. He had been calling for hours, or so it seemed. There had been no answer, no sign even from the search party he knew must be about somewhere, but he refused to give up. The pain in his ribs, the ache in his head, were getting almost unbearable now. He saw Joanna checking the medical tricorder once, and knew that she was getting more and more concerned about him as a patient.

"Captain," she interrupted at last. "Nothing I can say will stop you. I realise that. But I can stop you killing yourself in the search. Here." She held up a hypo.

"What...?"

"A painkiller and stimulant."

Kirk submitted. Sure enough, the pain subsided a little; it was now bearable. He went on.

"Spock! Bones! Spock!"

At last - at long last - he heard an answer. "Here, Captain!"

It was distant, but not too far so. With renewed vigour - the knowledge

that they were alive was a better stimulant than any drug, he thought - he went on. With renewed vigour, Joanna followed him.

They came out of the trees into sight of the great marsh, just behind the huge cat beast.

Quiet as they were, it heard them. It whirled, and sprang.

Kirk had time - barely - to push Joanna out of the way. Then it crashed against him, standing as he was where the girl had been only a second before.

Joanna, a highly-trained Starfleet crew-woman, didn't panic. She pulled out her phaser; she didn't dare use it on a kill setting - Kirk was too close to it as it crouched over him - but she fired on stun setting. At that range, she couldn't miss. The beast collapsed, half on top of Kirk, who gave an involuntary yelp at the new agony from his already maltreated ribs. Joanna sprang to help him, hoping as she did that a rib hadn't been driven into a lung, satisfied when she saw that Kirk wasn't coughing up blood. She hardly heard McCoy's "Well done!"

Helped by Joanna, Kirk staggered to his feet. She made him stand still while she checked his condition. He protested, but McCoy, now waist-deep in the evil-smelling mud, called, "She's right, Jim. Let her check you."

There was no additional damage. Though the cat's body was large, it had also been fairly soft, as was the ground at the edge of the swamp.

"Captain," Spock said. "Miss McCoy only stunned the beast. May I suggest that you now kill it? When it regains its senses it will surely attack again."

"Kirk nodded. "Yes, you're right, Spock." He killed the beast, rather regretfully, then reached for his communicator. "We'll soon have you out of there." He felt his belt, frantically. "My communicator! It's gone!"

Joanna felt for hers. "So has mine, Captain. They must have been jerked loose when the cat attacked."

Kirk drew a deep breath, then wished he hadn't. "We'll just have to do this the hard way, then," he said.

He turned back into the forest, looking for a long branch. There were none, however. None of the trees, large as some of them were, had branches of the size that he needed; they were either too thick and long, or too thin.

He looked at Joanna. "Hold my hand," he said. He began to wade slowly out towards Spock.

He was handicapped by not being able to use his left arm; however, Spock could use it to pull himself out. He stopped when he was within Spock's reach.

Spock leaned over, managed to grasp Kirk's body, and hauled himself out of the marsh's embrace. Kirk gritted his teeth as the pressure hurt his ribs. As soon as he could, Spock transferred his weight to Joanna's hand. All three were covered with the obnoxious mud before they again stood on dry land. Kirk hissed with pain as the mud went into new scratches he had received from the great cat's claws - scratches that until that minute he hadn't known he had.

Then, without giving himself time to think about the pain, he turned to McCoy.

"You won't be able to reach me, Jim," McCoy said. "That's how Spock got trapped."

"I'm the lightest," Joanna said. "If Mr. Spock goes in a little way...and I go past him...I should be able to reach Dad; and then Mr. Spock can pull us both out."

Spock waded back into the morass, and braced himself. He was near enough the edge of the moss for Kirk to reach him if necessary, but he had no intention of calling on Kirk if he could possibly avoid it. Joanna moved on past him, her lighter weight keeping her on the surface longer. She caught Spock's hand,

and moved as near McCoy as she could.

With her outstretched hand she could reach McCoy - just. He leaned over towards her, and grasped her hand. Then he began to pull himself out. She gasped with pain as the strain from the double pull tried to wrench her arms from her shoulders. Spock leaned back, trying to add to the pressure pulling McCoy from the noisome mud, and with a sucking sound McCoy came free. They scrambled, trying to help each other, until they reached solid ground, Kirk trying to help too.

Once they were all back on dry land, Kirk let himself sink to the ground. He was finished, and he knew it. McCoy leaned over him, snatching up Joanna's abandoned medical tricorder. Joanna left him to it, and turned her attention to finding at least one of the missing communicators.

"What happened to you two?" Kirk managed.

Spock began telling him about the test, but McCoy interrupted him. "Not now, Spock! There'll be plenty time for that after we get back to the ship. But the sooner we get Jim back, the happier I'll be. Whatever possessed you to come looking for us, Jim? You should still be in bed. And why Jo let you come..."

"She tried to stop me," Kirk said.

Joanna came over with one of the missing communicators, and McCoy grabbed it from her.

Their first priority on returning to the Enterprise was to get cleaned up. McCoy was particularly worried about the mud now plastering Kirk's claw wounds. Joanna left them while she got washed; but it was obvious that Kirk needed help to wash the mud off. In the end, McCoy decided that he would need Spock to help too, so they stripped off and washed together, Spock supporting Kirk while McCoy washed him.

Kirk lay on a bed in sickbay again, while McCoy carefully and very gently began to clean the last of the mud from the deep scratches - a thorough wash had not been sufficient to get it all out. Spock stood watching.

Kirk lay back, strangely content. It was good to have McCoy tending him, and he relaxed happily.

Joanna delayed returning to sickbay, although she knew she should get back as quickly as possible. She was thinking rather hard as she cleaned herself.

She owed Kirk an apology; she admitted it to herself. She owed Spock one, too, really, but especially Kirk. She had treated him badly, on the grounds of a tale told her by another girl - no, not just that, she thought. She had been jealous of Kirk - and of Spock.

She made her way slowly back to sickbay, and went in. She stopped just inside the door, looking at them.

McCoy was bending over Kirk, with Spock standing by, watching. There was an aura of happiness in the room - she felt it plainly. She was more than ever reluctant to go over - her presence would shatter the silent understanding that existed here.

Then Spock looked over and saw her. "Nurse McCoy," he said.

She went over to the bed.

"At last!" McCoy said. "Where on Earth have you been? Well, never mind, you're here now. Finish cleaning out these cuts, Jo."

She saw Kirk's anxious look as McCoy turned away, and guessed the reason for it. Kirk didn't want to be left to her impersonal ministrations. But McCoy only crossed to the table for a hypo. He came back adjusting it, and gave Kirk a shot.

"Isn't that rather a large dose, Doctor?" Spock asked.

"Yes, it is, Dr. Spock," McCoy replied. "Jim's physical condition is poor, doing all that down there on top of his previous injury. He can't have much resistance. I don't know if the alien bugs in the mud can harm us - but I'm not taking any chances."

Kirk watched him as he returned the hypo to the table, but he came back.

"Captain," Joanna said abruptly. He looked up at her. "I - I owe you an apology. When I first came on board, I...I didn't like you. I'd no real reason for it, except that...Dad had told me a lot about you in his letters, and I was jealous. I was a bit jealous of Mr. Spock too - " she glanced at him " - so I really owe you an apology too, Mr. Spock. But I kept Dad away from you both, and I...I'm sorry. After what happened down there...I know I was wrong."

Kirk glanced at McCoy. There was a relieved smile on the surgeon's face.

"It's all right, Jo," Kirk said. "Don't worry about it. And you know - I was a bit jealous of you. I'm sorry about that."

She flushed. "You had reason to be. I hadn't."

"Let's just forget about it, shall we?" Kirk asked.

She smiled. Then she said, "There is just one other thing, Captain. Thank you." She glanced at Spock. "Thank you both."

"Well, if that is all, Captain, Dr. McCoy and I have a duty to perform. We must return to the planet's surface and let the natives know that we survived the night in the forest - the future of the research station depended on our success. Then we must resume our course for Earth."

Kirk watched them leave, an affectionate smile on his face. Then he lay back to let Joanna finish cleaning out the cuts the great cat had given him. The rest of the voyage was going to be all right.

He closed his eyes, and relaxed in the first good night's sleep he had had for many nights.

BEAUTY - FOUR VIEWS by T.G.Z.C.

Beauty is a lovely lady
Moving graceful as she goes.
She is mine, I'll never leave her,
My beloved Enterprise.

Beauty is found in the eye of the looker;
So many things that are lovely I see;
But a fine healthy body, no need for my art -
That is the essence of beauty for me!

Beauty is a set of engines
Purring, busy, beating time,
Warp power drive and antimatter
That will get us there on time!

Beauty is found where ever you seek;
In balancing figures, and data unique.
Beauty is found in the calm sense of logio,
In skill in your work...and the smile of a friend.

BABEL SCENE by Janet Quarton

"Captain... Captain!"

There was no reply to Spock's urgent call; only a faint empty crackle from the intercom.

Spock's logical mind immediately assessed the facts. The Captain had been attacked; since he was now failing to respond he must be injured, perhaps severely. There was also his order...

"Take over, Mr. Chekov. Lt. Uhura, order security and medical teams to deck five, beside the Captain's quarters." The last word was almost lost as the elevator doors slid shut behind him.

Spock left the elevator at a run as he saw the Captain lying on the deck. As he approached Kirk, he saw the Andorian lying just beyond the Captain; a wicked-looking knife lay on the deck beside him. Thelev began to stir and Spock, concluding that the Andorian must be Kirk's attacker, hesitated only a second before giving the alien a nerve pinch to make sure he remained where he was.

Kirk was lying on his back; his whole body seemed to be numb now and he had no strength left. He had been sinking into the warm darkness when he recognised Spock's footsteps approaching and now he was desperately fighting to retain consciousness.

Spock knelt beside the Captain and Kirk, sensing the Vulcan's presence, opened his eyes and tried to sit up. He only succeeded in breaking into a fit of coughing which caused an unbearable pain in his back.

Spock, concerned, slipped his arm under Kirk's back and eased him up gently, trying to help. He fought to mask his alarm as he felt warm blood soaking into his sleeve as Kirk coughed.

The coughing fit ceased and Kirk lay back heavily on Spock's arm gasping with pain. He tasted blood in his mouth and couldn't hide a momentary stab of fear. Spock saw the flash of fear in Kirk's eyes and sensed his need for reassurance. With his free hand he brushed the lock of stray hair back from the Captain's damp brow.

"Take it easy, Jim," he said gently. "McCoy will be here in a minute."

Kirk looked up into the Vulcan's face and his fear vanished. He felt warm and safe in his friend's arms and allowed the darkness to close over him. Spock continued to support the unconscious body and could no longer hide his concern as he looked down at the pale, sweat-covered face, and noted how fast and shallow Kirk's breathing was. He heard footsteps approaching rapidly and adjusted his features into an impassive mask before looking round to see McCoy, closely followed by two orderlies with a stretcher trolley, appear round the bend of the corridor.

McCoy ran straight to Spock and Kirk, noting with alarm the blood on the deck.

"What happened?" McCoy ran his scanner over the unconscious body in Spock's arms even as he spoke.

Spock shook his head. "Uncertain," he replied. "The Captain reported that he had been attacked. I found him here, his assailant - I presume - is still unconscious. I know nothing more."

"Hmmm." McCoy made a face. "It's a nasty wound. Help me get him on the trolley."

Together they lifted Kirk and put him onto the stretcher trolley. Spock ignored his bloodstained hand and sleeve as he straightened up.

"I will join you as soon as the prisoner is in custody," he stated.

Running footsteps heralded the tardy arrival of the security squad. Spock made a mental note to query the cause of the delay; granted the men had further to come than either he or McCoy, but even so they should have arrived more quickly.

He ordered the Andorian to be taken to the brig, then turned to follow McCoy.

Every instinct bade the Vulcan to hurry, but he forced control on himself and moved at a steady pace to sickbay. He paused at the door of the examination room to ensure that his face was properly expressionless before entering.

McCoy was fussing over Kirk who lay face down on the examination couch. The bloodstained shirt lay discarded on the floor. Spock moved over for a closer look.

The injury itself did not look too serious, being a cut perhaps an inch in length; but bright red blood was still welling from it. Christine Chapel arrived wheeling a transfusion unit; she spared not a glance for Spock as she fastened the tube to Kirk's arm; from this the Vulcan deduced that the injury was, in fact, extremely serious. He glanced at the panel above Kirk's head and saw, with concern, that some of the readings were rather low.

McCoy turned round at that instant and saw the flicker of concern on Spock's face. He didn't show that he'd seen it, but moved over to the Vulcan.

"I'm afraid this is going to take a while, Spock. Jim's lost a lot of blood but I think he'll make it O.K. I suggest you go and get cleaned up and I'll let you know when I've finished. There's nothing you can do here." McCoy spoke gently; he was in no mood to tease the Vulcan.

Spock looked down at himself and realised that he was rather bloodstained.

"Very well, Doctor. I will be in my quarters." Spock turned to go but paused at the door for one last look at the Captain before leaving. McCoy had already forgotten the Vulcan and was working over the Captain again.

DAYDREAM by T.G.Z.C.

There are so many stars out there;
And each could give life to another world -
And life intelligent.

There are so many worlds out there
That even if I lived a million years
I could not visit all.

There are so many other men
Who dream, like me, of going to the stars;
One day, I know they shall.

The Enterprise...

A home for many people
Who have the urge to travel
To see far worlds, new ways,
And other cultures; and a haven
For one, who cannot find
Acceptance any other place.

T.G.Z.C.

THE YETI'S FOOTPRINT by Helen Sneddon

Micas 2 was a very pleasant place. The reports that had filtered back to the ship from the landing party had convinced Kirk that it would be worth while giving it a look; there were enough hostile planets around, a chance for a stroll on Paradise wasn't to be missed.

He spent the first minute after beamdown breathing in the mildly scented air, then another minute surveying the landscape before him. Without turning his head he could see just about every possible climatic variation - lush green grass, trees, lakes, interspersed with patches of rocky outcrops and desert scrubland, stretching in an undulating crazy patchwork to the forested foothills of the not too distant mountains, which sheered up almost vertically and disappeared into snow, ice and cloud.

Kirk snapped out of his daydream as Spock appeared, laden down with an assortment of survey gear.

"All packed up, Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, just a few more personnel to report back."

Kirk surveyed the landscape once more. "Strange to see desert so close to water, and the ice so near to all that temperate greenery."

"Extreme volcanic activity created the anomalies, Captain, forcing the mountains up to their precipitous heights, and pushing some of the underlying rock strata close to the surface to create the deserts. Our readings confirm this," he continued, warming to the subject, "and other tests conducted showed the development of some most interesting local phenomena, in particular a most curious..."

Readings, tests, phenomena... Kirk wasn't about to waste a few precious minutes listening to one of Spock's technical explanations.

"Animal life, Mr. Spock?" he interrupted.

"Animal life? Nothing of any great size, Captain, the largest would appear to be a species resembling a small goat."

"Small? How small?"

"About 20 inches."

"Horns?"

"No, at least none of those we have seen have them. They are rather wary of our presence, but our findings indicate them to be very intelligent."

"Good, well, that settles it."

"Settles what, Captain?"

"I'm taking a walk." The arrival of McCoy and Scott with another returning survey group further persuaded him.

"Lovely place, Jim," beamed the doctor. "Pity you can't..."

"That's just where you're wrong, McCoy. That's exactly why I'm here. I don't see why I should lose out." He turned back to Spock. "Who's left?"

Spock checked the assembled group. "Ensign Chekov is the only one still to report. He is working on the far side of the lake." He took out his communicator. "I'll call him in."

Kirk stopped him. "Don't bother, Mr. Spock. You start moving all the equipment back to the ship and I'll find Mr. Chekov." And with that he took a deep breath of warm air and set off along the path to the lake.

Chekov had finished his survey and was on his way back to the landing area,

but via another route, one which would take him away from the swamp and up into the rocky, ravine-ridden desert area. He had been five minutes into the sandy landscape when Kirk buzzed him to check on his whereabouts.

Feeling a little guilty about getting off his assigned route, he began a series of explanations, but Kirk cut him short. He understood, he felt the same. It wasn't often the pressures were eased and a chance could be found to do what one wanted to do, instead of what one was ordered to do.

"I'm heading for what looks like a deep gorge, Captain, just below a tall rock pillar formation."

Kirk scanned the rocky hillside rising a couple of hundred feet into the air about a mile away.

"I think I can see the pillar, Mr. Chekov. I'll head for that and meet you there. Kirk out."

Kirk altered his direction to intercept the ensign among the desolate hills off to his left.

The gorge was narrow, about forty feet wide at best, the walls rising almost vertically for a height of about a hundred feet, pitted with caves and ledges, the lowest some fourteen feet above ground level. Here and there along the length of the sandy floor were strewn strangely-shaped boulders of all sizes.

Chekov paused on the rocky entrance, the clattering of his feet, magnified by the gorge, echoing noisily along the length of the ravine. Here out of the sunshine it was cold, lifeless, eerie, unwelcoming, sinister. A slight shiver ran up his spine, but he shook it off and stepped purposefully forward onto the soft sand and into the shadow of the gorge.

His eyes shifted nervously about the high walls as he looked for signs of life, and his ears were alert for the slightest noise. Nothing moved, and all was still, but all that did nothing to dispel the cold clammy atmosphere which worsened the deeper he went into the gorge.

Coming to a halt about midway he causally dropped his eyes to the ground in front of him, and what he saw sent his blood racing uncontrollably through his body, setting every nerve on edge. A footprint.

Childhood tales of terror began to pour into his mind and his spine began to quiver helplessly. He inched closer, not daring to believe his eyes, then instinctively scrambled back as his worst fears were confirmed. It was exactly as Great Uncle Boris had described it. Great Uncle Boris had seen it, and lived to tell the tale. Now Great Nephew Pavel had seen it, but would he live to...

His heart turned to ice and he scurried for the shelter of the nearest rocks, fumbling clumsily at his communicator as he did so, trying to get some measure of control into his shattered nerve centre.

"C-C-Captain K-K-Kirk!"

Kirk was instantly on the alert, there could be no mistaking the fear in the Ensign's voice. Something was definitely wrong.

"What is it, Chekov?"

"Captain," he almost screamed in panic mixed with relief at having made contact. "I found a...f-footprint."

"Footprint? What kind of footprint?"

"A...big one."

"How big?"

"Very big."

"Human?"

"No...I don't think so..."

"Where are you?"

"In that gorge."

Kirk's eyes urgently scanned the rocky outcrops. Rocks, rocks, and more rocks. "Keep your communicator open and I'll find you," he instructed, and broke into a fast run in the direction of the signal.

Kirk reached the entrance to the gorge ten minutes later, pausing momentarily as the sound of his echoing feet surprised him. He ran into the gorge itself, phaser drawn, and gradually came to a halt. He looked cautiously around him, struck by the same chilling eeriness that had so affected Chekov. The steep cave-riddled walls stared back at him soundlessly, blankly. Nothing stirred in the valley, no movement, no sound...no Ensign. Of Mr. Chekov, there was no sign.

Kirk checked his communicator. This was the right gorge, the signal confirmed it.

"Chekov?" What am I whispering for? he thought. "Chekov!" he called, but the only answer came from behind him - an insidious, scraping, clawing sound that set every nerve on edge. Steeling himself for whatever it might be he turned slowly round. Chekov grinned apologetically from behind a comfortably large boulder.

"Ah...hello, Captain."

"Chekov! What do you think you're doing?" But he could understand something of the young lad's fear - hadn't he himself felt just a tinge of apprehension? It was the gorge that did it - the silence, the echo, the mysterious, clammy...

"Where's this footprint?"

Chekov, fortified by the Captain's presence, pointed it out. "You passed it, back there." He hurried over to the spot and dropped on one knee. "Here it is."

Kirk joined him and studied the impression closely. It most certainly was not Human. It had a span of about fifteen inches, and the indentations in the sand indicated three toes, each with a long claw or talon which had dug deep into the unresisting earth.

For a few minutes they studied it in silence. There was definitely something unreal about it - what kind of a creature would leave a mark like that? Kirk glanced about him suddenly; a feeling they were not alone, that they were being watched by someone...or something, would not let him be.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Chekov?"

"I think...I know what it is..."

Kirk looked at the fear stricken face. "You do?"

"Yes, sir. Great Uncle Boris said that..."

"Who?"

"Great Uncle Boris. He had a hunting lodge in the Himalayas. He told me about it."

"About what?"

Chekov pointed at the footprint. "That."

"What about it?"

"It's...it's the footprint."

"I know it's the footprint."

"No...it's the footprint. It's footprint."

Too much space was warping the lad's mind, thought Kirk.

"What's footprint?" he asked patiently.

"The...Yeti," Chekov almost whispered.

"The...whati?"

"The Yeti."

Kirk delved into the furthest reaches of his memory. Yeti? Yeti? He'd heard of that... Of course! - the Abominable Snowman!

"But that's just a legend, a myth. It doesn't exist."

Chekov bristled. "Great Uncle Boris saw it, and lived to tell the tale."

Kirk sighed. The only thing that was going to convince Chekov would be a hard fact or two. "But the Himalayas...snow, ice," he said, indicating the gorge. "This is a desert valley."

"The snow line is only a few miles away," Chekov corrected. "The Yeti will travel hundreds of miles in its search for..." he swallowed, "...food."

This was beginning to get out of hand. There was no place in mature civilised Starship personnel for such meanderings, Kirk decided. But there was the footprint, and this was an alien planet. But there had been nothing in Spock's report ...nothing that sensors had picked up, at any rate.

Kirk found himself recalling legends of his own homeland, in particular one about a great Bear Man rumoured to haunt the forested foothills of...was it the Rockies? The Appalachians? There were forests at the foot of the Micas mountains, weren't there? Nearer than Chekov's Yeti... A Bear Man, fourteen feet tall, six feet wide, hands that could tear trees apart, feet big enough to...to... - he glanced down - ...to leave a footprint just like this one...

He shook himself. Now he was getting just as bad as Chekov. There were no such things as...

His thoughts, and Chekov's, were frighteningly interrupted by the sounds of some unknown animal scraping on the stone entrance at the far end of the gorge. From the amount of noise that reached their ears it was no midget, and from the volume of unholy vocal sound that began to course along the valley towards them, it was no friend. It began as a low deep moan, rose undulatingly and horrifyingly in pitch and volume until they felt their blood would freeze, then slowly and gradually subsided into silence.

Kirk was amazed to discover both he and Chekov had pressed themselves instinctively against the gorge wall for safety. He pushed himself sharply off it and tried to pull his shattered nerves together.

"Such creatures just do not exist," he stressed, as much for his own peace of mind as Chekov's. Chekov nodded furiously.

"They don't, Mr. Chekov," Kirk insisted. Chekov continued to nod furiously. The noise from the entrance rose again, moaning, wailing, terrifying...

"On the other hand," continued Kirk, "it would do no harm to have another opinion." Chekov's head looked in danger of being shaken clean off his shoulders. Kirk pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to landing party."

"McCoy here."

Kirk heaved a sigh of relief and offered up a prayer. At least it had been Bones who answered. What Spock would have had to say if once he got an inkling of the mad ideas running through their minds didn't bear thinking about.

"Bones, are you busy?" he asked casually.

"Nope. Spock's managing to get all the equipment taken back. Scotty and I are just lazing around waiting for you two to arrive. Where are you anyway?"

"In a rocky gorge about a mile west of the lake. There's something here we'd like your opinion of."

"Is it anywhere near that big pillar?"

"Yeah, just at the base of it."

"Okay, we're on our way, we'll be along shortly."

Kirk put his communicator away. Play it cool, keep the head, no sense in panicking everyone, it might be nothing at all...

Despite his instructions to himself the next twenty minutes seemed interminable.

"What do you think of it, Bones?" They were all four clustered round the indentation in the sand.

"Weirdest thing I ever saw."

"Scotty? Any opinions?"

"Aye," the Engineer replied with great feeling.

"What?"

"It's just as he described it."

"What is? And who did?"

"Grandfather Angus. It's it a' right."

"What is?"

"That is. The beastie's footprint."

"Beastie?"

"Nessie," Scott said with deepest reverence.

Kirk couldn't believe his ears. "Nessie? You mean that antiquated lump of tourism you Scots keep dredging up whenever the economy flags?"

"Nessie exists!" Scott demanded indignantly. Kirk tried the same strategy he'd used on Chekov.

"Your Loch Ness Monster lives in water," he explained. "This is a desert valley."

"Yon loch is only a mile away. Nessie's been known tae travel great distances in search of food." He was as bad as Chekov.

"As far as the Himalayas?"

"Whit?"

"Chekov thinks it's a Yeti."

"Yeti? Huh! Bogey men! Nessie's real."

"The Yeti exists!" Chekov countered defensively.

"Look son, your Yeti's as real as the kick in your vodka. We Scots have real booze and real monsters."

"It's a Yeti."

"It's Nessie."

The argument continued between them. Kirk turned to McCoy and said quietly, "Any chance of it being made by a big Bear Man, about fourteen feet tall...;"

McCoy looked at him in disbelief.

"Well, if everyone's putting up ideas, I've got one to make."

"What?"

McCoy licked his lips and rolled his eyes. "The Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp."

All three looked at him. "Never heard of it."

"It's a great, black, slimey lizard that lives in the swamp back home," he elaborated. "When the moon's full it slides out backwards and tramples people to death."

"You're making it up."

"Well, aren't you?"

"Nessie is real, and that's her footprint! Or one like her..." Scott qualified. "The real Nessie's still in Scotland, of course..."

"It's a Yeti's footprint. I know it. It's exactly as Great Uncle..."

Its skin is all black and lumpy, and it oozes this hideous, foul, treacly slime. My grandpappy..."

"Gentlemen!" The argument abated as Kirk's voice brought them back to the matter in hand. "What is real is this footprint. Agreed?" They all agreed. "And some animal made it. Agreed?"

"Nessie."

"The Yeti."

"The Great Black Slime..."

"And that noise was real."

McCoy looked at Scott, and both looked at Kirk. "What noise?"

"We heard a noise..." He broke off and turned sharply in the direction of the end of the gorge. The hair on the backs of their necks rose as the scraping, slithering noise came again, closely followed by the same weird, ethereal, insidious, undulating moaning. When the last nerve shattering sound had vanished, a white-faced McCoy found his voice.

"What in hell was that?"

"It's the call o' the Monster," breathed Scott.

"Uncle Boris..." Chekov was near to panic. Kirk dealt with the situation firmly.

"Mr. Chekov, there is no need for panic. We must examine the available evidence, assess the situation fully, come to a logical conclusion, and then..."

"Then?"

He shrugged. "Then we panic." He grinned, Chekov grinned, and the tension eased. The four men clustered round the footprint once more.

"Well, Bones."

"Well, what?"

"Analysis."

"How can I analyse a footprint?"

"You must be able to say something."

McCoy looked at him sceptically then aimed his tricorder at the sand.

"What do you read?"

"Air."

"Air?"

"Well, a footprint isn't anything, is it, it's just a lot of air surrounded by sand!"

"All right, all right. What can we tell by the shape?"

"It's more than a foot wide, three toes with claws on the end...one or two bits in the middle, probably pads of flesh."

"Could it be a paw?" Kirk asked hopefully.

"I don't think so." Kirk felt a touch of dejection as his Bear Man theory took a tumble. "The toes are longer and thinner, but it's hard to say, we're dealing with alien life here, remember."

Kirk studied the impression for a few seconds more then his brow furrowed. "How tall would you say it was?"

"From the size of that print, about fifteen feet at least."

"Standing erect?"

"Yes."

"On its one leg?"

"One leg?"

"We've...ah...only got one footprint." He got wearily to his feet. "Mr. Chekov, Mr. Scott, see if you can find any more. That is if we haven't obliterated them all already."

"Here's another!" Chekov called. It was only about eight feet away, among some low rocks.

"And one here!" called Scott from the far side of the gorge.

No more were found, just the three. They gathered by the first footprint to discuss their findings.

"So what do we have? Suggestions?"

"A creature with three legs?"

"A biped with an eight foot stride."

"It could be a one-legged creature...that hops."

"Or a quadruped with a wooden leg."

"McCoy..."

"There could be more than one, Captain. It could be three one-legged creatures."

"Or a biped, and another biped...with a wooden leg."

"Gentlemen, there is one other important factor we have missed. There are only three footprints, none of which is near the entrance to the gorge. How did this creature get in without leaving tracks at either end?"

Realisation slowly dawned on the men as to this fact.

"You realise what this means?"

"Aye, it must have wings."

As neither the Yeti, the Loch Ness Monster, the Bear Man nor even the Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp had been famed for their wings the next few seconds passed in silence. Then Kirk felt his nerve ends receive another twisting, this time from the other end of the gorge.

"Ssssh! What's that?"

The slithering, scraping noise was starting again, only this time it was different. Louder, nearer... Then it stopped abruptly.

"It's coming in!" Chekov panicked.

Why is it always the Captain who has to take the lead, Kirk wondered momentarily as he found himself involuntarily at the front of the group. Then his thoughts were concentrated on preparing to meet whatever was coming into the gorge. Tensed, ready, prepared for anything...anything except...a Starship uniform? Spock? Spock!

"Spock!" he exclaimed, relieved, as the familiar Starship blue hove into sight at the end of the gorge. The Vulcan paused as he caught sight of the huddled group by the large boulder, then continued on along the sand to meet them.

"Captain, I was..."

"Sssssh!"

Spock lifted one eyebrow at the remark and dutifully fell silent. Kirk beckoned him over to the footprint.

"We found this footprint. What do you think?"

"It's...interesting."

"Interesting?" challenged McCoy. "Is that all you can say about it?" Spock gave the doctor one of his long-suffering looks and got down on one knee beside the footprint.

"You found this impression?"

"Yes. You said there was no life of any size here, Spock, but something made that."

"And whatever made it," said Chekov, "is lying in wait for us at the end of the gorge."

"Have you formed any opinions as to what it could be?"

Kirk looked uncomfortably round. "Well." He wasn't getting any help from the rest of the group. For the first time since they got there, they were quite reluctant to talk. "Well...we threw out a few ideas, but nothing concrete..."

"Hmmm." He studied the footprint. "It does appear to have three toe-like projections, each with a distinct projecting spur on the end, and a rounder central portion here..."

Interest revived in the watching group. "It does?"

"Yes."

"About how tall would you estimate?" Kirk asked eagerly.

"Three feet three inches."

"What? Is that all?"

"Yes, far too small to be your Bear Man, Mr. Chekov's Yeti, Mr. Scott's Loch Ness Monster, or even..." he cast a withering glance in the direction of McCoy, "...the Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp."

A stunned silence descended on the group.

"How...how did you..."

Spock stood up. "The same way I knew how to locate you." He moved over to the large boulder and picked up an object from the sand at its base. "Mr. Chekov's communicator."

Three pairs of eyes turned slowly in the Ensign's direction.

"Has that been open since I got here?" queried Kirk, in not too friendly a manner.

"Well, I suppose...I mean, I must have forgotten..."

"When I went to call you," continued Spock, "I discovered I was already in contact. It has been a most entertaining journey here," he added, suppressing a smirk, but not quite far enough to escape McCoy's eagle gaze.

"You're so damn smart, I suppose you know what made that footprint!"

"Certainly. A species known as Pes Tripodis."

"Pes what?"

"Pes Tripodis, or translated, the foot of a tripod, specifically Starfleet regulation support tripod mark two. If you will recall the configuration of the base you will no doubt remember that it has three projecting feet each with an elongation on the end for stability..."

"All right, all right, all right."

"And I doubt very much if its lying in wait for you at the end of the canyon since I returned it to the ship some time ago."

"I take it you were surveying this gorge?"

"Yes, Captain. Didn't you notice our footprints?"

"Mr. Chekov!" It just wasn't the Ensign's day. "Did you not notice any footprints other than this one?"

"No, sir, I mean, I saw this one and I thought..."

Kirk sighed. "And by the time we were all through tramping up and down we wouldn't be able to tell yours from ours."

"But what about that scraping and howling?" asked McCoy. "Or was that you, too?"

"Yes, very interesting. It came over the communicator. One moment." He walked up the canyon in the direction of the noise and disappeared.

He was back in a few minutes. "Very interesting."

"What's up there?"

"Nothing. At least nothing more than a Micas goat. I think you'll find that's the cause of the occurrences."

"Goat? One little goat? How could..."

"The echo, Captain."

"Echo?"

"The phenomenon we were investigating. I tried to tell you about it earlier, but you were in a hurry to be elsewhere. The echo is only triggered from within a specific area at either end of the gorge. Here in the middle it is non-existent, as we discovered from our survey tests."

"One stupid little goat?"

"On the contrary, as I also explained earlier, a very intelligent goat."

"Explain."

"For the past hour or so the goat has been trying to reach its cave, probably one of those off that ledge above your heads. It is naturally wary of Humans, and it has found a whole collection of them sitting on its front doorstep. By standing at the entrance to the gorge, its natural call has been distorted and amplified by..."

"I don't believe it."

"As you will, but I think you will find that to be the case." He indicated the gorge entrance. "I think it is time we were heading back to the ship," he said and set off. The others watched him go, then dejectedly began following him.

When they reached the end of the gorge they stopped and looked back, just in time to see a little goat-like creature trot in from the far end, leap lightly onto the large boulder, and from there onto the ledge and into one of the caves.

All four turned and headed back to the beamdown point in silence. None of the four were keen to engage the Vulcan in conversation, not after the fools they'd made of themselves. All except McCoy, of course. After a few minutes silent walking he spoke to Kirk, but in a voice loud enough for Spock to hear.

"Of course, only we primitive Humans would think up such ridiculous myths and legends. The Vulcans wouldn't dream of having anything as illogical as Yetis and Loch Ness Monsters, would they?"

"On the contrary, Doctor, we do."

"You do? Well, well. well!" The doctor rubbed his hands in glee. "We've had things from the swamp, the lake, the forest and the snowfield. Doesn't leave you much, Spock. What's it going to be?"

"Ah...the Desert Demon."

"The...what?"

"The Desert Demon. Said to haunt the great Shiraken Desert. Whole caravans of travellers have disappeared whenever the Demon chose to strike. Reports of the being's shape are many and varied, but what does remain constant is its method of attack. It spreads itself..."

McCoy looked at Kirk. "He's making it up."

"Didn't you?"

"Me? Of course not! Have I got to suffer...?"

"...like a great gelatinous net over the sand, not unlike your spider spinning a web to catch the unwary insect, then causes the surrounding sand to swirl over it as camouflage. And all without the aid of a full moon."

"Jim, stop him!"

"You stop him, you started him!"

"It lies in wait for the unsuspecting traveller, who does not realise what lies underfoot..."

"It's twenty minutes back to the beamdown point!"

"...victim, who realises to his cost that it is too late."

"I can't stand it!"

"Great Uncle Serrian....."
